

THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION:  
A NEW GROUP OF YOUNG, POLITICAL ACTORS ON THE STAGE

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ABSTRACT

Millennials, born between 1982 and 2003, now comprise almost one-third of the U.S. population. Without their overwhelming support for his candidacy, Barack Obama would not have been able to secure his party's nomination or win the Presidential Election in 2008. Using generational theory, this thesis examines this age group to understand its characteristics, the values it brings to the political process, and its possible future impact on the political scene.

This thesis puts the Millennials into a context of other generation types which have dominated previous American eras. Further, it sets this generation within the context of the history of the successful fight for the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment and successive elections in which relatively few young people cast a ballot.

This thesis then provides an exploration of the work organizations did to secure the youth vote in the past, as well as what strategies were employed in the 2008 election and are likely to be employed to insure the future involvement of this group in the political life of the country. Further, this thesis offers some preliminary analysis, suggesting that the 2008 election may well have been a realignment election to the left.

This thesis demonstrates that the question "Will young people vote?" is simply the wrong question to ask. In the end, the better question to ask is: "Will this generation of young people vote?" The answer, based on the findings of this thesis, is an unequivocal "Yes."

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## INTRODUCTION

Louis L'Amour once stated that "to make democracy work, we must be a nation of participants, not simply observers. One who does not vote has no right to complain."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, many Americans are not heeding this piece of advice. One of the most disturbing elements of American democracy is the growing number of its citizens not taking an active role in the electoral process by casting a vote. While the turnout rates of all Americans have been decreasing over the last few decades, the participation rates among youth (ages 18-29) are nothing short of alarming. However, change maybe on the horizon based upon trends in the recent 2008 primary contest for the Presidency and the subsequent general elections. During the 2008 election in the primary and general elections, young people, recently coined the "millennial generation," voted in record numbers. Many have described not seeing this form of participation since the passage of the 26th amendment in the 1970s. Is the tide turning on young people getting engaged?

This thesis will explore this new generation and hopefully tackle some elements of youth engagement. The first chapter will explore the history of youth participation and turnout (as compared to older Americans) beginning with the work leading to the passage of the 26th amendment which allowed 18-20 year-olds the right to vote and the subsequent elections that followed, including exploring the efforts of both partisan and non-partisan forces in ratifying the amendment and turning out young voters in an expanded electorate. The chapter will then examine additional points of success and

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<sup>1</sup> ThinkExist, "Louis L'Amour Quotes"; available from [http://thinkexist.com/quotes/louis\\_l'amour/](http://thinkexist.com/quotes/louis_l'amour/); Internet; accessed 12 July, 2008.

failure in youth turnout and the forces responsible for this success, including the 1992 elections. The second chapter will examine this new “Millennial generation.” What do they think? Are they engaged? How do they compare to past generations? It is clear that the answers to these questions are far more complicated than simply, “young people don’t care.”

The third chapter will explore more recent activities to engage youth. Beginning in the 2004 elections and leading up through the 2008 election cycle, young people are beginning to make a greater impact in the political sphere. This chapter will explore that growth and look at what may be some of the causes. Particular emphasis will be placed on efforts by both partisan/ideological organizations as well as non-partisan groups. The fourth chapter will provide a comprehensive discussion on different strategies to engage young voters and their success based on experiments in the field. The thesis will conclude with an exploration of the explosion in youth engagement in 2008, the Barack Obama candidacy, and what one might be able to predict of this Millennial generation in the years to come.

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORY OF THE YOUTH VOTE**

The history of youth engagement in politics is a complicated one. There have been many organizations which have proven successful in capturing the youth vote, while some have died out. This chapter will explore the work of past generations to engage young people. One of the beginning discussions of youth engagement in politics is the premise that if one is old enough to fight and possibly die for the country, then they should have a voice in electing the person who will send them off to war. This chapter will first discuss the engagement with youth leading up to the 1971 passage of the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment which enfranchised 18, 19, and 20 year-olds.

### **Youth's Effort to Get the Vote and Get out the Vote (1940's-70's)**

When beginning to examine the participation of youth in elections, it is best to look at turnout rates beginning in the 1972 election after the ratification of the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment which enfranchised 18 to 20 year-olds. However, in order to properly assess this achievement and explore the importance of youth to the democratic process, one must delve into the fight that led to passage of the amendment. The passage of the amendment was an almost 20-year battle for suffrage that was faced with failures and victories. In the end, it is important to note how close 18 to 20 year-olds came to not being allowed to vote in 1972.

The case for universal youth suffrage, as discussed by Wendell Cultice,<sup>2</sup> was centered on the idea that if a person was old enough to fight in a nation's wars and die in those conflicts, then they should be given the right to vote. While calls for voting rights began as early as after the Revolutionary War and every subsequent conflict thereafter, the beginning signs of movement into the direction of true voting rights began just after the beginning of World War II. In 1943, Georgia was the first state to allow citizens 18 years of age and older the right to vote. Shortly thereafter, the Democratic National Committee passed a proposal in their platform to endorse the lowering of the voting age, with the Republican National Committee following suit. During this time, no fewer than 100 proposals to lower the voting age were introduced at the state legislative level, with only the Georgia case successful. After a series of defeats, youth voting advocates received a welcome endorsement in their cause when President Eisenhower became the first president to push for 18 to 20 year olds to have the right to vote in 1954. However, at the state level, only one state, Kentucky in 1954, successfully approved 18 to 20 year old suffrage.

During the sixties, several groups formed as a vehicle for youth engagement: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Students for a Democratic Society on the left and the Young Americans for Freedom and Young America's

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<sup>2</sup> Wendell Cultice, *Youth's Battle for the Ballot: A History of Voting Age in America* (New York: Glenwood Press, 1992), 226-228.

Foundation on the right. The roots of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee<sup>3</sup> began in February 1960, when a group of black college students in Greensboro, NC sat down at the lunch counter in a local store and refused to leave until they were served. This simple act was in defiance of both law and local custom, which forbid black people of any age from sitting down to eat where white people ate. The students were beaten by other customers and arrested. “Sit-ins” electrified black students all over the South. Publicity in local papers spread the word about sit-ins to communities all across the nation. Within weeks, hundreds of students had staged sit-ins and developed other forms of protest in their local communities. In April of that same year, student protesters were invited to a conference at Shaw University in Raleigh, NC. The conference, organized by Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) organizer, Ella Baker, was called to provide students with the opportunity to interact with each other, share ideas about other forms of protest which might be developed, and to develop regional coordination for those activities. Out of that conference emerged the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Marion Barry, later mayor of Washington, was elected as the first chairman.

In the beginning, SNCC<sup>4</sup> was seen as a clearinghouse for information but did not envision an activist role for itself. It quickly became apparent that few people were willing to devote time and energy to passing on information without being actively

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<sup>3</sup> Charles McDew, “A Brief History of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee”; available from <http://www.charlesmcdew.com/sncc/index.html>; Internet; accessed 15 July, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

involved themselves in a movement of historic significance. However, debates arose among the SNCC participants about direct action in contrast to the usual tactic of using legal avenues to fight segregation. All these discussions led to a second conference, at which time Charles McDew was elected chairman of SNCC. SNCC opted to become an activist organization, sending organizers out into cities and towns in the South to extend the reach of the protests into black communities beyond college campuses. Some of the early members left at that time because of conflicting opinions about non-violence, direct action, or legal issues.

Under McDew's<sup>5</sup> direction, SNCC hired organizers called "field secretaries" who went into small towns all over the South to develop local leadership in civil rights activities. Most of SNCC's money went to rent store front offices in small towns as well as legal expenses, which were very high, due to the fact that SNCC organizers were arrested for civil rights activities. These organizers decided to concentrate their efforts on voter registration, education, and community organizing. Despite the fact that blacks were the majority in many southern counties, only a handful had ever been allowed to register to vote. SNCC believed that in order to have a long term effect on the communities they organized, that they had to develop local leaders who would remain in the community to continue the work after the organizers left. So their style was to stay in the background and put forward local leaders instead. They argued against what might be called "the cult of personality."

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

According to McDew<sup>6</sup>, SNCC also made the decision to sponsor Freedom Summer, when hundreds of white college students from the North would come South to teach in "Freedom Schools," work on voter registration projects, and assist the SNCC organizers in their work. The summer volunteers would bring additional publicity to the SNCC. The organization believed that reporters who came into the South to observe the white volunteers of Freedom Summer would provide a certain amount of security for their organizers. That prediction was proven tragically incorrect when, at the very beginning of the summer, three organizers, two white Northerners and a black Southerner, were murdered by white supremacists in Mississippi.

Finally, SNCC<sup>7</sup> also organized the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, a campaign to train blacks in voting and political issues as well as inspire more political participation. A delegation was elected to attend the 1964 Democratic National Convention, where they demanded to be seated instead of the all-white delegation elected by segregationists. This direct public challenge to the political establishment failed at that time, but it forced the Democratic Party to change the way they conducted their conventions in the future. It led directly to changes in the Democratic Party which demanded that delegations be integrated and as well as include more women representatives.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)<sup>8</sup> was established in late 1959 by Aryeh Neier (Director of the Socialist League for Industrial Democracy). SDS held its first meeting in Ann Arbor, MI in 1960. Its first President was Alan Haber, while its first mark on the political landscape was the Port Huron Statement of 1962, drafted principally by Tom Hayden, a former editor of the University of Michigan's student newspaper and later President of the SDS. The Port Huron Statement denounced bigotry in the United States, world hunger and American abundance, materialism, personal alienation, industrialization, the threat of nuclear war, military spending, and the Cold War.

Calling for “participatory democracy,” the Port Huron Statement stated: “[The] allocation of resources must be based on social needs. A truly public sector must be established, and its nature debated and planned. At present the majority of America's public sector, the largest part of our public spending, is for the military. When great social needs are so pressing, our concept of government spending is wrapped up in the permanent war economy.”<sup>9</sup>

SDS's<sup>10</sup> initial efforts at the promotion of civil rights, voting rights, and urban reform were gradually overshadowed by its focus on the Vietnam War. In April 1965,

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<sup>8</sup> “Students for a Democratic Society.” Encyclopedia Britannica Online; available from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/569902/Students-for-a-Democratic-Society>; Internet; accessed 16 July, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> The Sixties Project, “Port Huron Statement”; available from [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/SDS\\_Port\\_Huron.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/SDS_Port_Huron.html); Internet; accessed 16 July, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> “Students for a Democratic Society.” Encyclopedia Britannica Online; available from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/569902/Students-for-a-Democratic-Society>; Internet; accessed 16 July, 2008.

SDS participated in the March on Washington in opposition to the War. In 1966, when President Lyndon Johnson abolished student draft deferments, some 300 new SDS chapters were formed. Among the organization's activities were: disrupting ROTC classes, staging draft card burnings, and harassing campus recruiters for the CIA and for firms that conducted research tied in some way to national defense. SDS also occupied buildings at universities and destroyed draft records.

By the spring of 1968, national SDS<sup>11</sup> activists led an effort on the campuses called "Ten Days of Resistance" and local chapters cooperated with the Student Mobilization Committee in rallies, marches, sit-ins, and teach-ins, which culminated in a one-day strike on April 26th. About a million students stayed away from classes that day, the largest student strike in the history of the United States. At the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, SDS members protested the candidacy of Hubert Humphrey. Hayden and other members were arrested and indicted for crossing state lines to incite a riot. They became known as the Chicago Seven. However, the fervor and strength of SDS would be short lived. By the fall of 1969, many of the SDS chapters had split up or dissolved due to infighting. By 1972, SDS had dissolved and joined forces with William Ayers to form a new organization, the Weathermen Underground.

While two of the strongest youth-based organizations on the left were mostly defunct by the late 1960's, youth on the right had greater success. One of the strongest

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

organizations born from this era is the Young Americans for Freedom.<sup>12</sup> YAF began in 1960 when roughly 90 young people at the Sharon, CT estate of William F. Buckley, Jr. gathered to lay the groundwork for a new national conservative youth organization. It is here that Americans for Freedom formally organized and drafted their statement of principles called the Sharon Statement. In 1962, Ronald Reagan joined the group's National Advisory Board. The first national YAF convention was held in 1963 in Florida with over 450 delegates in attendance. However, one of the organizations first major activities was their work on behalf of Barry Goldwater's campaign for president in March 1964. It is seen that Goldwater's run for the White House engaged the YAF more than any other event in its history. One highlight of YAF's movement to make Goldwater the Republican nominee was a large rally in New York's Madison Square Garden in 1964 where more than 18,000 conservatives gathered to show their support for Senator Goldwater. Lee Edwards, former New Guard (the magazine of YAF) editor, said "Barry Goldwater made YAF, but YAF also made Barry Goldwater."<sup>13</sup>

In addition to its electoral work, one of the mainstays of the YAF<sup>14</sup> was its "STOP RED TRADE" program. Companies such as IBM, Mack Truck, and Firestone Tire and Rubber were targeted by the organization for engaging in high visibility trade with the Soviet Union. One of the most successful YAF campaigns on this front was stopping

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<sup>12</sup> Young Americans for Freedom, "History of YAF"; available from <http://www.yaf.com/history/index.php>; Internet; accessed 17 July, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Firestone's attempt to build a synthetic rubber plant in Communist Romania through the use of letter-writing campaigns, boycotts, and demonstrations. YAF's plan to distribute 500,000 flyers at the Indianapolis 500 was seen as the primary tactic which forced Firestone executives to reverse its decision. YAF also targeted left wing groups such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and New MOBE (New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam) in support of a U.S. victory in Vietnam.

During the 1970s, YAF<sup>15</sup> began a number of projects to support Vietnam veterans and their causes. "Project Appreciation" gave members the opportunity to write, visit, and provide needed supplies to hospitalized veterans. YAF also worked on various POW/MIA issues, including publicly going on the offensive against celebrity opponents of the War. YAF, while generally supportive of the Republicans, also strongly opposed President Nixon's effort to normalize relations with China. However, the highlight of the organization's work occurred in 1974, when YAF, along with the American Conservative Union, sponsored the first gathering called the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC). CPAC has now become the largest annual gathering of conservatives and is still growing strong today.

In the end, it is important to note that much of the groundwork that YAF<sup>16</sup> performed led to the rise of Ronald Reagan as a conservative icon and led to his Presidency. They are still playing a role, albeit smaller to this day, working to establish a

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

conservative voice on many college campuses. However, while their heyday was clearly in the 1960s and 70s, the Young America's Foundation is continuing to carry the torch for conservative principals among young people.

Young America's Foundation<sup>17</sup> began in the late 1960s at Vanderbilt University when a group of students formed an organization called University Information Services (UIS). Formed in reaction to the left-wing groups on campus, the objective behind UIS was to provide students with conservative ideas with an outlet for those ideas. In the early 1970s, UIS became a national organization that was renamed Young America's Foundation. The goal of bringing conservative speakers to campus remained, and the Foundation launched a nationwide effort to bring the Conservative Movement's greatest minds and voices to college campuses in an effort to provide intellectual balance.

In 1974, the Young America's Foundation<sup>18</sup> expanded its activities by initiating and financing a nationally syndicated radio program featuring California Governor Ronald Reagan. Governor Reagan's addresses, focusing on a variety of issues including taxes, crime, and foreign policy, helped strengthen the future president's national reputation. Beginning in the early 1970s, the Foundation published an annual debate handbook for college and high school debate teams. In 1976, they inaugurated a national bicentennial program honoring the "Founders' philosophy of freedom."

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<sup>17</sup> Young America's Foundation, "Young America's Foundation's Mission"; available from <http://www.yaf.org/mission/index.cfm>; Internet; accessed 18 July, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Foundation leaders also helped establish the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in the mid-1970s.

One major highlight of the Foundation's<sup>19</sup> work has been seen in its Annual National Conservative Student Conference which began during the summer of 1979. Student leaders gathered from across the country to experience an intensive week of informative seminars and training in campus activism. Students also had an opportunity to meet and discuss issues with professors, movement experts, public policy leaders, media personalities, and like-minded students. During a 1983 conference, the Young America's Foundation made national headlines when two summer conference attendees were arrested by D.C. police for protesting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan outside the Soviet Embassy. The Foundation appealed the case all the way to the Supreme Court when, in 1988, the Court awarded the students a major First Amendment victory. The Supreme Court ruling in *Boos vs. Barry* overturned a fifty-year-old law barring protests outside of embassies.

Young America's Foundation<sup>20</sup> has also published a variety of materials that have advanced conservative ideas. Early books included *American Economics Texts: A Free Market Critique* (1982) and an examination of Columbus' impact on America entitled *Columbus on Trial* (1992). The Foundation also supported the republishing of several classic conservative works including Barry Goldwater's *The Conscience of a*

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

*Conservative* (1980), and Henry Regnery's *Memoirs of a Dissident Publisher* (1985). Dr. Burton Folsom, a Hillsdale College professor and frequent conference speaker, wrote *Entrepreneurs vs. the State* (1987), which is in its fourth edition as a Foundation publication. This is just an example of the early work that the Young America's Foundation has done to engage conservative youth.

While there was considerable activity among youth organizations of the 1960's, according to Cultice,<sup>21</sup> the years brought very little success to the youth movement to expand the electorate even though the constitution was amended to allow for suffrage of the citizens of the District of Columbia and an end of restrictions of the rights of African-American to cast a vote. Proposals at both the state and federal levels were soundly defeated. One item to note is that with the growing problems of the Vietnam War and the vehement distain by young people of the conflict, that had 18-20 year olds been given the right to vote, the outcome of the 1968 election would have more than likely been different. President Nixon was very aware of this fact when he began to explore the possibility of lowering the voting age, either by federal law or constitutional amendment. His main concern was not whether or not to support youth suffrage, but to make sure the 1972 elections were not put into crisis over uncertainty over who could vote in the election.

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<sup>21</sup> Wendell Cultice, *Youth's Battle for the Ballot: A History of Voting Age in America* (New York: Glenwood Press, 1992), 229-230.

During this time however, a new organization formed in order to push for youth suffrage. This The Youth Franchise Coalition<sup>22</sup> was a group of 23 national and regional youth groups joined together with one common goal: to lower the voting age in time for the 1972 elections. The organization consisted of a coalition of labor, student groups, faith-based groups, and constituency groups representing African-Americans, women, and Jews, with a combined membership of just over 2 million people. The group was organized in over 40 states and the District of Columbia. The coalition's office in Washington was run by one executive director, one assistant, and student interns. The organization funding came from individual donations, group membership dues, and foundation support.

The Youth Franchise Coalition<sup>23</sup> was really fighting two battles, one at the Capitol and one in the halls of state legislatures around the country. The thought behind this process was that if they could reduce the voting age in state at the same time action was being taken federally, the amendment would ultimately be ratified faster. In the states, Coalitions first created state committees, who organized trips to their state legislatures and mounted letter-writing campaigns to key members of those bodies. They also maintained communication with Coalition members through a newsletter. At the federal level, the group worked to rally allies among elected official in congress to act as public spokesman on the issue. These included many of the younger members of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 99-100.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 99-100.

Congress from both parties, including Birch Bayh and Edward Kennedy. Secondly, the coalition worked to form key allies in more traditional interest groups, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Education Association (NEA), and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). This allowed the organization to utilize existing memberships in those organizations as well as use of the established lobbying shops that they had built. This was a strategically sound decision on the part of the coalition. While they could have worked to create their own in-house shop, they would not have had the rapport that these established organizations had already developed on Capitol Hill and at the state-level. Additionally, these organizations had past expertise in working on proposals to expand the electorate. Finally, as members of these organizations were on average also younger, the coalition felt as if they would provide needed resources to the cause.

As Cultice<sup>24</sup> explains, it was not long before the coalition began to see tangible results. In February 1970, young people got their first victory when President Nixon proposed a constitutional amendment to lower the voting age. Shortly after this announcement, the Senate passed an amendment to the Voting Rights Act which lowered the voting age to 18 on all elections with the House supporting the measure in June that same year. It appeared that the issue at this point was resolved and that 18 to 20 year olds would be able to vote in the 1972 elections, however, four states filed suit stating that the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 231-233.

rule was unconstitutional on the grounds that it was up to the states to conduct elections, not the federal government. It was termed the “Christmas Decision,” the Supreme Court upheld the rule lowering the voting age in federal elections but declared extending this right to state and local elections was unconstitutional. It is important to note that the Coalition and its supporters provided legal expertise on the issue as well as research and legal assistance, and ultimately filed an amicus brief with the Supreme Court.

According to the Cultice,<sup>25</sup> this decision forced the federal government to respond to change the voting age via the Constitution. On March 10, 1971, the full Senate voted unanimously for a resolution calling for a constitutional amendment lowering the voting age, with the House voting for the measure two weeks later. The Coalition knew that time was running very short for ratification in time to avoid confusion and crisis for the 1972 election, so they pushed their state operation into high gear. Within the first day of passage by the house, five states ratified the amendment. In the course of just 26 days, 25 state legislatures had ratified the amendment. On June 30, 1971, three states, Alabama, North Carolina, and Ohio passed the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment, officially giving the measure enough support to be added to the constitution. The fight lasted a total of 100 days and became the quickest ratification process in history. The Youth Franchise Coalition disbanded shortly after the passage of the Amendment.

Once the amendment was ratified, the work began to register and turnout the newly expanded electorate. The two main interest groups that formed to work on this

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 214, 224-225, and 231-233.

effort were the National Movement for the Student Vote and the Youth Citizenship Fund, discussed in the research of Carole Jean Sheffield<sup>26</sup>. The National Movement's implicit goal was focused on registration of young people in 304 college communities which made up 80 percent of the college population. The organization was governed by a board of directors as well as an advisory board made up of elected officials of both political parties. The national office was based in Washington, run with a group of professional staff and operated on a budget of just under \$1 million. The organization had a legal department, which provided the organization and the public with information and legal expertise on issues related to student registration. The communication department handled all interaction with the press and compiled all statistics of the organization's work. However, the strongest element of the National Movement was its field program.

According to Sheffield,<sup>27</sup> the field program ran in three phases: the campus centered effort from October 1971 until May 1972, the first vote summer program from June until October 1972, and a final campus "clean-up" campaign from August until October 1972. National Movement set up 13 regional field offices for this first stage with staff to target roughly 304 campuses with populations of over 5000. These staff coordinators were responsible for training campus organizers in the law and procedures for registering students. In the end, this phase registered just over 500,000 new voters. The second phase was an effort to register non-student youth in the work force. They

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<sup>26</sup> Carole Jean Sheffield, "The Campaign to Mobilize the Newly Enfranchised in the 1972 Presidential Election: An Interest Group Analysis of the National Movement for the Student Vote and the Youth Citizenship Fund, Inc." (Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 1973), 45-47.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-52.

targeted 15 urban areas with high concentrations of young people. As this was a shift in demographics from the first field campaign, the National Movement hired more minority staff to target African-American youth as well as those with labor organizing background to better tap into urban youth. In total, the campaign registered just under 500,000 people. In the final phase, the organization conducted a “clean-up” campaign targeting incoming freshman that were not registered during its previous effort on college campuses. This shorter campaign focused not on the regional system of the first campaign, but focused on states with high student population. In the end, an additional 125,000 young people were registered. It is important to note that all of the work of the National Movement concluded at the end of the registration period in the states. There was no follow-up or “Get Out the Vote” work done on the individuals that the National Movement registered over the course of 12 months.

The second group, as analyzed by Sheffield,<sup>28</sup> was the Youth Citizenship Fund (YCF), which in many ways took the work done by the National Movement in its second field campaign and expanded it. The organization conducted its efforts over a nine-month period from April to December 1972 with 112 field staff in primarily urban communities working to register non-student youth 18 to 24 years of age. The organization’s staff had considerable experience in working with urban minorities in the civil rights movement, so it was a natural extension of their expertise, to register voters targeted to that particular demographic. The field program, in its simplest terms,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 58-60.

organized drives where the staff knew large groups of youth would congregate such as concerts, parks, housing projects, and sporting events. The staff also provided staffing assistance and resources to outside local groups, who were working to organize and register youth. Finally, the YCF was involved in several specialty campaigns which targeted specific groups of youth. These included outreach to military service men and women, a motor home mobile registration program, and a high school voter registration and education project.

Finally, during this era of the expanded electorate, the major political parties made some efforts to engage young voters. *Time* magazine wrote numerous articles highlighting the Democratic and Republican Party's outreach to youth. Both created organized youth divisions with professional staff whose goal was to turnout youth for a particular candidate. Both the Nixon and McGovern campaigns also had youth vote directors. The Republican's youth vote division had 12 paid staff, specifically targeting non-college youth.<sup>29</sup> Their belief was that McGovern had a lock on this vote so the only way to effectively tap into the expanding electorate was to go after working, more conservative youth.<sup>30</sup> They also organized younger government officials and Republican celebrities to speak to youth groups across the country.<sup>31</sup> The highlight of these events was a 6,000 person strong "Young People for the President" rally at the Republican

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<sup>29</sup> "G.O.P. Reach to Youth," *Time*, 31 January 1971; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,878460-2,00.html>; Internet; accessed 15 July, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Convention.<sup>32</sup> This event showcased young people's importance to the political process. The Democrats organized events across the country promoting the Democratic ticket and created a 100,000-member "youth army" to register young voters on campuses and turnout the youth vote for the democrats.<sup>33</sup> There was also a concerted effort by the democrats to have a large number of young people participate in the 1972 Democratic National Convention. Over 23 percent of the delegates were young people, a record that has yet to be broken.<sup>34</sup>

According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE),<sup>35</sup> young people demonstrated in the 1972 elections that all of the hard work to gain the right to vote was not in vain. This coupled with a huge and vocal distain for the Vietnam War portrayed itself with a turnout rate of 55.4% of young people aged 18-29, with just under 28 million young Americans casting a ballot. This was 15 percent difference in turnout compared with the turnout all other Americans. However, this shining demonstration of democracy would be, unfortunately, short-lived. By the next election, turnout rates of young people dropped over seven percent. This pattern continued over the next three elections.

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<sup>32</sup> "The Cheerleaders," *Time*, 4 September 1972; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,910383,00.html>; Internet; accessed 15 July, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> "Wooing the Youth Vote," *Time*, 31 July, 1972, available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,877924,00.html>; Internet; accessed 15 July, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, "Young Voter Turnout 1972-2004"; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/?page\\_id=241](http://www.civicyouth.org/?page_id=241); Internet; accessed 4 July, 2008.

Cultice<sup>36</sup> provides many explanations for increasing apathy after the landmark 1972 election. First, the unparalleled scandal in the years following the 1972 election had a drastic effect upon continued youth participation. A second reason was that more young people at the time considered themselves independent rather than aligned with one political party, therefore simply making a choice between one party's candidate over another might be unappealing (however, as seen later in this thesis, there may be changes in this explanation for today's young voters). Thirdly, when young people fully achieved the right to vote in the 1972 elections, overall participation in the democratic process was beginning to decline as well. If the general public was not participating at higher rates, how can one expect youth to buck the trend? Lastly and most importantly given this discussion, one of the most interesting reasons to explain the drop in youth voting was the dissolution of the national partisan and non-partisan groups that fought so for the right to vote in 1972. Without these groups, no one was speaking to young people about the issues that concern them and encouraging their participation in the political process.

### **The 1992 Surge in Turnout**

This leads to the election of 1992 where CIRCLE estimated that youth turnout reached 52 percent, the highest level since 1972.<sup>37</sup> This presidential election was marked with an increase in outreach to young voters, especially via the media and by non-

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<sup>36</sup> Wendell Cultice, *Youth's Battle for the Ballot: A History of Voting Age in America* (New York: Glenwood Press, 1992), 221-222.

<sup>37</sup> The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, "Young Voter Turnout 1972-2004"; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/?page\\_id=241](http://www.civicyouth.org/?page_id=241); Internet; accessed 4 July, 2008.

partisan groups. Rock the Vote, as discussed by Everette Dennis and his colleagues at the Freedom Forum,<sup>38</sup> was founded in 1990 to fight censorship of the music industry by building a core of young voters. The group established voter registration booths at rock concerts across the country (registering over 350,000 new voters), aired/produced public service announcements (PSAs) on MTV as well as print publications targeting youth, and established a toll-free number with information on how to register to vote.

According to Dennis,<sup>39</sup> this was coupled with news coverage of the campaign by the media targeted at youth. MTV's "Choose or Lose" campaign provided young people with daily coverage of the election from the primary contests through the general election; usually followed by an ad from Rock the Vote encouraging youth to vote. In fact, former President Clinton widely attributed his appearance on MTV in 1992 as a defining moment in his victorious campaign. Additionally, CNN and numerous print publications also made a push to target young voters. Finally, many attest to the fact that with a three-person competitive race for the Presidency that all voters, including youth, were at stake. Young people truly felt as if their vote was especially important.

According the CIRCLE,<sup>40</sup> this attention paid off with higher turnout that year. Unfortunately, that trend did not hold as 1996 turnout was at the lowest levels since

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<sup>38</sup> Everette E. Dennis and others, *The Homestretch: New Politics. New Media. New Voter?* (Arlington, VA: The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, 1993), 22.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-27.

<sup>40</sup> The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. "Young Voter Turnout 1972-2004"; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/?page\\_id=241](http://www.civicyouth.org/?page_id=241); Internet; accessed 4 July, 2008.

before 1972. Many see this breakdown in the success of young voting again due to the lack of emphasis placed upon youth after the election. Young people began to feel as if they were just being used as an electioneering tool and that their issues following the election were not being considered. Finally, the 1996 election was not the competitive race of 1992 as President Clinton was seeking re-election and the Perot-factor was not as significant.

In the end, the youth movement from the civil rights era to present has seen its share of success and failure. While the ultimate success during this era was the passage of the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment, many of the organizations responsible for its passage did not survive. In addition, many of the groups that developed in decades past can now only be found in the pages of history books and first hand accounts as they too have dissolved. Equally as disturbing, is that despite higher turnout of 1972, youth have, for the most part, not replicated that effort. However, that may be changing as a new political force emerges, the Millennial generation. The next chapter in this thesis will examine this new group of young voters by using a generational framework to compare and contrast them to previous generations as well as explore the values and sentiments they share.

## CHAPTER TWO: WHO ARE THE MILLENNIALS?

Apathetic and don't care. Lazy and uncaring about the world. These are just some of the phrases the press and the public have used to describe young people, and in the past, they were likely correct. Throughout much of the last 25 years, since the landmark turnout of youth in the 1972 election, volunteerism and civic engagement among young people have been going into a steep decline. This downward spiral reached an alarming rate in 1996 when less than 39 percent of young people cast a ballot for president, and dipped to an even lower point of 20 percent in the 1998 midterm elections.<sup>41</sup>

Even as many were beginning to think that youth would never participate, something remarkable began to occur. During the 2000 elections, civic engagement among youth began to go up, leading to the first increase in turnout among the 18-30 age group in 12 years.<sup>42</sup> The increase in turnout continued in the elections of 2005 and 2006 with youth credited for securing the Senate for the Democrats. With this consistent increase in turnout, many started to see this rise, not simply as a historical aberration, but the beginning of a trend of increased political engagement by this country's young people.

At the same time, new youth engagement organizations, particularly on the progressive side of the isle, began to crop up. All of these groups, using new types of outreach methods such as online social networking technology, coupled with traditional

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Connery, *Youth to Power: How Today's Young Voters are Building Tomorrow's Progressive Majority* (Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2008), 9.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

field operations, are working tirelessly to continue the growth of youth's engagement in politics. For progressives, this means creating the type of organizations that are as strong and stable as their conservative counterparts.

Ultimately, behind this rejuvenation in engagement is the rise of a new generation of voting Americans: termed the Millennial generation. Unlike their predecessors, they are not disinterested and apathetic. In fact, if early indications based on their participation in the political arena in 2004, 2006 and 2008 bear out, then the millennial generation could be the most civically minded generation since the GI or "Greatest" generation from the 1930s and 40s.<sup>43</sup> While this generation is just in its infancy in terms of civic life (as not all members of this generation can even vote yet), they are already beginning to make quite a splash on the political scene.

So who are these new millennials? How do they think? How do they compare to the older generations? This chapter is designed to educate the reader about this generation of voters. However, in order to adequately explain their behavior, one must first enter into the theoretical framework of generational politics. Generational theory basically states that the attitudes and behaviors of each generation are cyclical in nature and repeat roughly every 80 years.<sup>44</sup> Recent generations will be explored to see how they fit into one of four "generational types" as well as how they are engaged or unengaged in politics. The next section will delve into the Millennial generation in detail and explore

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>44</sup> Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais, *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 25.

how they fit into a specific type of civic participant that will make their mark on politics for the next 40 years.

### **The Basics of Generational Theory**

The term “Millennial” has its roots from work of two theorists: William Strauss and Neil Howe. Their work has contributed to the explanations of what generations are, how they interact, and the role history plays in future generations.<sup>45</sup> The word was, for the most part, chosen by members of the generation, who participated in their research.<sup>46</sup> Other possibilities at the time included, “Generation Next” and “Echo Boom.” In fact, many subjects chose the term “don’t label us” which is in sharp contrast to their Generation X predecessors.<sup>47</sup>

In their work, Strauss and Howe identified four major generational types as described by Morley Winograd and Michael Hais in their work, *Millennial Makeover*.<sup>48</sup> Each generation is, on average, twenty years long and each cycle roughly eighty to ninety years long. At this point, the authors estimate that society is currently in the fifth historical generational cycle, which began around 1967 and will not be complete until 2050. With one exception in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, each type occurs in the same order. Each

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<sup>45</sup> Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais, *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 25.

<sup>46</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 6.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais, *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 25.

generation has a set of particular attitudes, values, and behaviors which are similar regardless of when in American history it occurs.

Winograd and Hais<sup>49</sup> describe four types of generations that fall into a strict order: the Prophet/Idealist, Nomad/Reactive, Hero/Civic, and finally Artist/Adaptive. The first archetype is the Idealist generation. Idealists are known as a “dominant and inner-fixated” generational type. Members of this generation are reared in an indulgent manner and are specifically driven throughout their lives by their deeply held personal values. Baby boomers, those born between 1946 and the early 1960s, are considered to be in this generational archetype. The second archetype is known as the Nomad or Reactive generation. They are considered to be a “recessive” generation, due in large part to its unprotected rearing, and the fact that they are criticized and condemned. Members of this generation are individualistic and more alienated from group dynamics. This can lead to their risk-taking, entrepreneurial, and pragmatic manner later in adulthood. Generation X, those born between the mid 1960’s until the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, falls into this generational type.

The third generation archetype described by Winograd and Hais is known as the Hero or Civic generation<sup>50</sup>. This generation is often described as “dominant and overfixated.” The members of this generation were reared in a generally protected manner, which had led to their awareness to societal challenges, problem solving, and

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<sup>49</sup> Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais, *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 26.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

institution building as hallmarks of their lives as adults. Barring the millennial generation which will be discussed later in this chapter, the last major generation to employ these characteristics was the GI generation or “Greatest” generation, who were born between 1901 and 1924.

Finally, the last archetype they discussed is known as the adaptive or artist generation.<sup>51</sup> Members of this generation were raised in homes that are described as “overprotected and suffocating.” As adults, this tends to make them quite risk averse, conformist, and inclined toward compromise. In our current generational cycle, these are children born in the early 2000’s. Because of this, they are not yet a named generation. The last generation to exhibit these qualities was known as the Silent generation, who were born from 1925 to around 1945. One interesting note is that they are the only generation from which a president has not been elected.

The next section delves deeper into the values and mindset of the Millennial generation to answer the questions of “who they are” and “what they think about the world.” In their work *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*,<sup>52</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss provide us with some basic characteristics and values that this new generation holds. Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira’s work, “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation: The Emerging Evidence on Why the Younger Generation is

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>52</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000).

Boosting Progressive Prospects for the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, ”<sup>53</sup> provide the reader with much of the raw data that confirms the values assessments made by Howe and Strauss.

### **So Who are the Millennials?**

As stated previously, the Millennial generation is becoming the most common name for young people born mainly in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, who are currently or recently out of college.<sup>54</sup> This generation is larger than the Baby Boomers, however, how much bigger depends on where you put their beginning and end birth dates (there is no official consensus). In a desire to paint the most accurate picture, Millennials are defined as Strauss and Howe did used birth dates in 1982, when the birth rate started climbing from the lows of the Generation X years, and ending in 2002, which is typical of the 18-to-20 year span for a generation.<sup>55</sup>

Similar to the Boomers, Leyden and Teixeira<sup>56</sup> assert that the Millennials are poised to impact the workings of this country at every stage of their lives and in a multitude of ways, especially in the realm of politics. They estimate that in 2008, the number of eligible millennial voters is estimated to be near 50 million. By the 2016

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<sup>53</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira, “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation: The Emerging Evidence on Why the Younger Generation is Boosting Progressive Prospects for the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century”; The New Politics Institute; available from [http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full\\_report=1](http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full_report=1); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 14.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira, “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation: The Emerging Evidence on Why the Younger Generation is Boosting Progressive Prospects for the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century”; The New Politics Institute; available from [http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full\\_report=1](http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full_report=1); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

presidential election, members of this generation will be one third or more of the electorate, and roughly 30 percent of actual voters. This is not assuming increased turnout rates among Millennials in the future, which could make their weight among actual voters even higher. From that point on, they conclude that the Millennials' share of actual voters will continue to rise for several decades as more of the generation enters middle age.

The Millennials are an unusual generation, not like young people this country has seen for a long time. As noted earlier, they are not individualistic risk-takers like the Boomers or cynical and disengaged like Generation Xers. Millennials are civic-minded, politically engaged, and hold values long associated with progressives, such as concern about economic inequalities, desire for a more multilateral foreign policy, and a strong belief in government.<sup>57</sup> Members of this generation are generally more interested in giving back to their communities. For example, the American Freshman survey showed 83 percent of entering freshmen volunteered at least occasionally during their high school senior year, the highest ever measured in this survey while over 71 percent said they volunteered on a weekly basis.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 12.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira, "The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation: The Emerging Evidence on Why the Younger Generation is Boosting Progressive Prospects for the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century"; The New Politics Institute; available from [http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full\\_report=1](http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full_report=1); citing the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Higher Education Research Institute, "CIRP Freshman Survey, December 2006"; available from [http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/PDFs/06CIRPFS\\_Norms\\_Narrative.pdf](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/PDFs/06CIRPFS_Norms_Narrative.pdf); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

### *Millennials by the Numbers*

It is generally known that the Baby Boomers are a huge generation that is aging and about to place a major strain on our Social Security system. But few realize that the Millennials are even larger. This is true no matter what definition you use. For example, Leyden and Teixeira<sup>59</sup> estimate that with a beginning birth date of 1982, after the baby bust” (which Generation X is typically linked to) had ended, and continuing until 2002 that the size of this generation is truly staggering: 95 million (though only about half are adults) out of a population of 300 million, compared to 78 million Boomers. By 2008, there will be over 50 million eligible to vote. By 2018, Millennials, by this definition, will be 100 million strong and all members of the generation will be old enough to vote. Even taking citizenship into account, there will still be 90 million eligible Millennial voters. However, even if one uses the most conservative estimates of Millennials which use 1996 as the last birth year for the generation, so that the number of birth years covered by this generation is the same as that covered by the Baby Boomers (1978-1996 vs. 1946-64), this generation is still larger: 80 million today and 83 million by 2016, when the tail end of the generation votes in their first presidential election. The size of the Millennial generation is so great partly because many Millennials are children of the Boomers (the "echo boom").

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<sup>59</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira, “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation: The Emerging Evidence on Why the Younger Generation is Boosting Progressive Prospects for the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century”; The New Politics Institute; available from [http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full\\_report=1](http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full_report=1); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

The size of the generation is also boosted by the children of unprecedented numbers of immigrants migrating to the United States in the last several decades. The Millennials are the most diverse generation by far, with almost 40 percent belonging to minority groups.<sup>60</sup> According to the March 2006 Census, about 62 percent of Millennial adults are white, 18 percent are Hispanic, 14 percent are black and 5 percent are Asian.<sup>61</sup> Reflecting this diversity and a generational proclivity toward seeing race as “no big deal,” Millennial attitudes on race are extremely progressive.<sup>62</sup>

Leyden and Teixeira found considerable data to back up this assertion. In the Pew Gen Next<sup>63</sup> study almost all (89 percent) of white 18-25 year old Millennials said they agreed that “it’s all right for blacks and whites to date each other,” including 64 percent who completely agreed. Back in 1987-88, when the same question was posed to white 18-25 year old Gen Xers, just 56 percent agreed with this statement. Data from a 2005 Gallup poll<sup>64</sup> helps to underscore these findings with 95 percent of 18-29 year olds saying they approve of blacks and whites dating and 60 percent of this age group saying

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<sup>60</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 15.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the U.S. Census Bureau, “Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004”; available from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p20-556.pdf>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 217.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, “Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes: 1987-2007: Political Landscape more Favorable to Democrats”; available from <http://peoplepress.org/reports/pdf/312.pdf>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Gallup Organization, “Minority Rights and Relations, June 6-25 2005.

they had dated a person of a different race. In addition, 82 percent of white 18-25 year old Millennials in 2003 disagreed with the statement that they “don’t have much in common with people of other races.”

*“The Millennial Personality:” Values and Issues*

Generations are more than just numbers; they have personalities that are shaped by many factors, including what is happening in the world when they come of age. As stated earlier, the last generation to share similar values as the Millennials is that of the GI generation, lauded by some as the “Greatest” generation, who fought in World War II and built up America and the world in the postwar boom. Millennials are fundamentally optimistic, willing to trust political leaders who perform well, and they believe in an activist government.<sup>65</sup>

Citing a series of Pew surveys, Leyden and Teixeira reflect this optimism.<sup>66</sup> In a February 2006 survey, 18-29 year olds were the most optimistic age group in assessing whether today’s children would grow up better or worse off than people are now (45 percent better/40 percent worse). Other age groups responded more negatively than positively by margins ranging from 17 to 27 points. In a July 2006 survey, 18-29 year olds were the most positive about whether they would move forward in their lives in the next five years (72 percent versus just 13 percent who expected no change and less than 8

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<sup>65</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 44.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Pew Research Center, “Once again, the Future Ain’t What It Used to Be”; available from <http://pewresearch.org/assets/social/pdf/BetterOff.pdf> and “Public Says American Work Life is Worsening, But Most Workers Remain Satisfied with Their Jobs”; available from <http://pewresearch.org/assets/social/pdf/Jobs.pdf>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

percent who thought things would be worse). They were also more likely to believe they had made progress in life over last five years (58 percent versus 20 percent who thought they had stayed the same and 18 percent who thought they had regressed).

It's also worth noting that Millennials are shying away from the kind of high risk behaviors that promote pessimism, cynicism, and an inability to solve problems.<sup>67</sup> The first Millennials began their senior year in high school in 1996 and 1997. Leyden and Teixeira found that those years showed a peak in the use of drug by their peers (as measured by the National Institute on Drug Abuse's annual Monitoring the Future survey).<sup>68</sup> This trend had been rising throughout the early 1990's, when later Gen Xers were reaching their senior year in high school. However, since then, drug use has been in decline for almost all drugs tracked by the survey. For example, 42 percent of 12th graders in 1996 said they had used an illegal drug in the last year, compared to just 37 percent in 2006. Perhaps even more significant, drug use is now being delayed by young teens. In 1996, 24 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders said they had used drugs in the last year; now only 15 percent claim that.

Millennial teens are also waiting to have sex.<sup>69</sup> Leyden and Teixeira also found this to be the case looking at data from the Guttmacher Institute.<sup>70</sup> In 2002, 13 percent of

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<sup>67</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 202.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the National Institute on Drug Abuse, "32nd Annual Monitoring the Future Survey"; available from <http://monitoringthefuture.org/data/06data.html#2006data-drugs>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 197.

females and 15 percent of males age 15-19 had sex before they were 15, whereas in 1995 those figures were 19 and 21 percent respectively. Pregnancy rates for teenage girls age 15-19 is now 75 per 1000 which has decreased 36 percent since its peak in 1990. Births among this age group are also down by 31 percent over the same time frame.

Millennials also show considerable concern for income and social inequality and in the world today, and it's possible the new overall goal of this generation will be one that will "look out for everyone in society."<sup>71</sup> This matches many of the same goals of the GI generation. In the 2004 National Election Survey,<sup>72</sup> 84 percent of Millennials stated that the gap between rich and poor had grown over the last 20 years, with 94 percent seeing the gap as a negative thing. These figures are considerably higher than those for older generations. In the Magid Associates 2006 survey of Millennials for the New Politics Institute,<sup>73</sup> transition Millennials (born 1984-88) were more likely than any other age group to support government action to tackle economic inequality among Americans. Those termed as cusp Millennials (born 1978-83) shared similar attitudes, albeit, by a smaller margin.

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<sup>70</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Guttmacher Institute, "U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity"; available from <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/2006/09/12/USTPstats.pdf>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>71</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 106.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the American National Elections Studies; available from <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcda+nes2004p>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing Magid Associates paper for the New Politics Institute, "The Politics of the Millennial Generation"; available from <http://www.newpolitics.net/sites/ndn-newpol.civactions.net/files/MillennialGenerationPolitics.pdf>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

One would be remiss not to discuss the fact that gender issues have all but faded from this generation's focus.<sup>74</sup> Leyden and Teixeira found evidence to bolster this argument in the 2004 National Election study.<sup>75</sup> In the study, respondents were asked to place themselves on a 7 point scale based on the following statements: "Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government. Others feel that women's place is in the home." In the survey, "one" shows the strongest support for women's equality while "seven" is the strongest support for women's place being in the home. Two-thirds of Millennials chose "one" and 88 percent of Millennials picked "one," "two," or "three" on the seven-point scale (indicating they felt closer to the equal role statement than to the women's place in the home statement). Both of these figures are higher than for any other generation.

In many ways, Millennials are just responding to the reality of their generation. In their mind, women are not only equal in their experience but, in ways are, taking the lead in many areas. For example, as Howe and Strauss note, girls tend to outperform boys in elementary and secondary school, getting higher grades, choosing more difficult academic programs, and participating in advanced placement classes at higher rates.<sup>76</sup> Leyden and Teixeira also found these trends when exploring gender in higher

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<sup>74</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 222.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the American National Elections Studies; available from <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcda+nes2004p>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>76</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 223.

education.<sup>77</sup> 56 percent of today's undergraduates are women, compared to 44 percent who are men. Finally, while in 1970 fewer than 10 percent of medical students and four percent of law students were women, today's women are roughly half of the nation's law and medical students, not to mention close to 55 percent of the nation's professionals as a whole.

In the end, Leyden and Teixeira show that Millennials don't perceive difference between genders, races or even sexual preferences the way other generations do.<sup>78</sup> This generation's racial attitudes have already been discussed, but their views on sexual orientation are perhaps the most striking. For example, in a 2007 Pew survey, a majority (56 percent) of 18-29 year olds supported allowing gays and lesbians to marry, while the public overall opposed gay marriage by a 55-37 majority. In addition, a 2006 Pew survey found that 18-25 year olds favored allowing gays to adopt by 61-35 margin, while other adults were opposed 50-44. Similarly, in the November 2004 Reboot study of 18-25 year olds, a majority (53 percent) said they favored legalizing gay marriage. Finally, in an August 2005 Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (GQR) survey of 18-25 year olds, 82 percent

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<sup>77</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira, "The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation: The Emerging Evidence on Why the Younger Generation is Boosting Progressive Prospects for the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century"; The New Politics Institute; available from [http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full\\_report=1](http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full_report=1); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes: 1987-2007: Political Landscape more Favorable to Democrats"; available from <http://peoplepress.org/reports/pdf/312.pdf>; "A Portrait of Generation Next" available from <http://peoplepress.org/reports/pdf/300.pdf>; the Reboot Organization, "OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era"; available from [http://www.greenbergresearch.com/articles/1218/1829\\_rebootpoll.pdf](http://www.greenbergresearch.com/articles/1218/1829_rebootpoll.pdf); and Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research Organization, "Coming of Age in America, Part II"; available from [http://www.gqrr.com/articles/1010/2618\\_COA20905.pdf](http://www.gqrr.com/articles/1010/2618_COA20905.pdf); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

reported that they personally knew or worked with someone who was gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT).

Millennials also hold more progressive positions in other areas as well. For example, they show a deep concern for issues such as global warming and the environment. Millennials believe that the country should do “whatever it takes to protect the environment.”<sup>79</sup> Leyden and Teixeira also found that they also support stricter environmental laws and regulations and believe that it is worth the cost to pay higher prices in order to protect the environment.<sup>80</sup> In a March 2005 Gallup poll, 58 percent of 18-29 year olds stated protecting the environment should be a priority “even at the risk of curbing economic growth,” while just 32 percent prioritize economic growth “even if the environment suffers to some extent.” This compares to a narrow 48 percent to 41 percent split among respondents aged 50-64 and an even narrower 44 percent to 38 percent split among those 65 and over.

Finally, Millennials support a more multilateral and cooperative foreign policy as compared to their elders.<sup>81</sup> They feel as if the government should not act unilaterally, but work cooperatively to solve the world’s problems. Leyden and Teixeira cite several

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<sup>79</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 223.

<sup>80</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Gallup Organization, “Public Priorities: Environment vs. Economic Growth”; available from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/15820/Public-Priorities-Environment-vs-Economic-Growth.aspx>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>81</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 296.

examples to demonstrate this assertion.<sup>82</sup> The Pew Values data shows that 18-25 year old Millennials in 2002-03 were split on whether military strength is ultimately the best way to promote peace. Older Americans supported this concept by a 61-35 margin. In 2004 Pew data, only 29 percent of 18-25 year old Millennials believed that “using overwhelming force is the best way to defeat terrorism,” as compared to 67 percent who thought “relying too much on military force leads to hatred and more terrorism.” By contrast, those 26 and over were much more closely split (41-49). In addition, 62 percent of Millennials believe the country should take into account the interests of its allies around the world even if it means making compromises. Over 52 percent of their elders felt the same way. Similarly, in November 2004 Democracy Corps polling, 57 percent of 18-29 year olds believed that America’s security depends on building strong ties with other nations, compared to just 37 percent who believed that “bottom line, America’s security depends on its own military strength.” This sentiment was the most pro-multilateralist of any age group.

Leyden and Teixeira also found that Millennials also take very different lessons from 9/11.<sup>83</sup> In an April 2005 Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research (GQR) poll, 18-25 year olds believed by 55-44 margin that the attack on 9/11 means “America needs to be

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<sup>82</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, “Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes: 1987-2007: Political Landscape more Favorable to Democrats”; available from <http://peoplepress.org/reports/pdf/312.pdf> and the Democracy Corps, “Solving the Paradox of 2004” available from [http://www.greenbergresearch.com/articles/1239/784\\_Post-Election%202004.pdf](http://www.greenbergresearch.com/articles/1239/784_Post-Election%202004.pdf); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>83</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research, “Coming of Age in America, Part I”; available from [http://www.gqr.com/articles/814/2617\\_COA10605.pdf](http://www.gqr.com/articles/814/2617_COA10605.pdf) and American National Election Studies data; available from <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harsda+nes2004p>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

more connected to the world, rather than have more control over its borders.” Similar results were also found in the 2004 NES. They found 57 percent of Millennials said that promoting human rights was a “very important” goal of foreign policy. This figure is substantially higher than among any other generation.

Additionally, they found Millennials are also now the most hostile to the war in Iraq and to President Bush’s handling of it.<sup>84</sup> In the 2006 Pew polls, an average of 26 percent of this 18-29 year olds approved of Bush’s handling of the Iraq war versus 69 percent who disapproved. In the 2006 election exit polls, 62 percent of 18-29 year old voters disapproved of Bush’s handling of Iraq, including 43 percent who strongly disapproved and 65 percent thought the US should start withdrawing troops from Iraq. This was the highest response rate of any age group. In addition, a majority of those voters did not think the Iraq war had improved the long-term security of the country. Similarly, in the April 2005 GQR poll of 18- 25 year olds, 63 percent of this age group thought the war in Iraq “wasn’t worth the costs” and 64 percent thought the “Iraq war wasn’t part of the war on terrorism.”

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<sup>84</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Pew Research Center, “Iraq Views Improve, Small Bounce for Bush” available from <http://peoplepress.org/reports/questionnaires/278.pdf>; CNN, “America Votes 2006”; available from <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/US/H/00/epolls.0.html>; Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research, “Coming of Age in America, Part I”; available from [http://www.gqr.com/articles/814/2617\\_COA10605.pdf](http://www.gqr.com/articles/814/2617_COA10605.pdf); and American National Election Studies data; available from <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harsda+nes2004p>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

### *Millennial's Views on Government and Elections*

Millennials also show a non-cynical attitude toward political activity and government.<sup>85</sup> In the Harvard Institute of Politics (IOP) October 2006 survey<sup>86</sup> of 18-24 year olds, 60 percent see political engagement as an effective way of solving important issues facing the country. Additionally, 71 percent think it is an effective way of resolving issues in their local community.

Millennials disagree with the idea that if the federal government runs something, it is automatically wasteful and inefficient.<sup>87</sup> Leyden and Teixeira cite several studies to show youth attitudes about government.<sup>88</sup> According to Pew Values surveys, 18-25 year olds in 2002-03 disagreed with that idea by a 2 to 1 margin (64-32), while 18-25 year old Gen Xers who were asked the same question in 1987-88 were split, 47-47. In addition, the 2006 CIRCLE Civic and Political Health of the Nation survey of 15-25 year olds found a strong endorsement of the idea that the “government should do more to solve

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<sup>85</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 233.

<sup>86</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Harvard Institute of Politics, “The 11th Biannual Youth Survey on Politics and Public Service”; available from [http://www.iop.harvard.edu/pdfs/survey/fall\\_2006\\_topline.pdf](http://www.iop.harvard.edu/pdfs/survey/fall_2006_topline.pdf); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>87</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 233.

<sup>88</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, “Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes: 1987-2007: Political Landscape more Favorable to Democrats”; available from <http://peoplepress.org/reports/pdf/312.pdf>; the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “2006 CIRCLE Civic and Political Health of the Nation survey”; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/2006\\_CPHS\\_Report\\_update.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/2006_CPHS_Report_update.pdf); and Democracy Corps “The Democrats Moment to Engage”; available from [http://www.gqrr.com/articles/815/705\\_Democracy%20Corps%20-%20The%20Democrats%20Moment%20to%20Engage.pdf](http://www.gqrr.com/articles/815/705_Democracy%20Corps%20-%20The%20Democrats%20Moment%20to%20Engage.pdf); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

problems” (63 percent) as opposed to the belief that “government does too many things better left to businesses and individuals” (31 percent). Similarly, in June 2005 Democracy Corps polling, 63 percent of 18-29 year olds saw the role of government as one to promote the principle strong community and policies that expand opportunity and promote prosperity for all, not just a few. This is compared to 35 percent who saw the role of government as promoting self-reliance and limited government. This split was the most pro-active government/strong community of all the age groups. 30-39 year old Gen Xers for example, were split 50-45 on this question.

Finally, the Harvard IOP October 2006 survey<sup>89</sup> of 18-24 year olds found a number of non-cynical sentiments toward politics and political service. Just about 71 percent disagreed that “politics is not relevant to my life right now” and 84 percent disagreed that “it really doesn’t matter to me who the president is.” Over 55 percent disagreed that “people like me don’t have any say about what the government does,” while 59 percent disagreed that “political involvement rarely has any tangible results and 56 percent disagreed that “it is difficult to find ways to be involved in politics.” In addition, 67 percent agreed that “running for office is an honorable thing to do.” The figures for whether community service and getting involved in politics were honorable things to do were 88 percent and 60 percent respectively.

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<sup>89</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Harvard Institute of Politics, “The 11th Biannual Youth Survey on Politics and Public Service” available from [http://www.iop.harvard.edu/pdfs/survey/fall\\_2006\\_topline.pdf](http://www.iop.harvard.edu/pdfs/survey/fall_2006_topline.pdf); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

It is important to note, however, while Millennials clearly believe in an activist role for government, they are not satisfied with the way politics is recently conducted or with the politicians that represent them.<sup>90</sup> Leyden and Teixeira found that sentiment as well in the Harvard IOP survey. The survey found that 78 percent of young people agreed that “elected officials seem to be motivated by selfish reasons,” while 74 percent agreed that “politics has become too partisan.” In addition, 69 percent agreed with the statement that “the political tone in Washington is too negative” and 75 percent agreed that “elected officials don’t seem to have the same priorities that I have.”

Given their clear activist views on government, Leyden and Teixeira found that Millennials are also more active compared to other generations in terms of election-related political engagement.<sup>91</sup> According to National Election Study (NES), 18-29 year olds in 2004 were rated higher on a wide range of political involvement indicators, when compared to 18-29 year olds in previous elections. These indicators included level of interest in the election, “caring a good deal who wins the election,” trying to influence others’ vote, displaying candidate buttons or stickers, attending political meetings, and watching TV programs about the campaign. More detail on political engagement is also found in the October 2006 Harvard IOP survey of 18-24 year olds. In that survey, 48 percent said they had signed an online petition, 31 percent had written an email or letter

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<sup>90</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 230.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing American National Election Studies data; available from <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hnsda?harcnsda+nes2004p> and the Harvard Institute of Politics, “The 11th Biannual Youth Survey on Politics and Public Service”; available from [http://www.iop.harvard.edu/pdfs/survey/fall\\_2006\\_topline.pdf](http://www.iop.harvard.edu/pdfs/survey/fall_2006_topline.pdf); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

advocating a political position, 29 percent had contributed to an political discussion or blog advocating a political position, 21 percent had attended a political rally, 18 percent had donated money to a political campaign or cause, and 14 percent had volunteered on a political campaign for a candidate or issue. In addition, 60 percent said they followed news about national politics closely and thought political engagement was an effective way of solving important issues facing the country. Over 71 percent saw this engagement as an effective way of solving important issues facing their community.

More recent research also backs up the increased engagement of young people. In a Pew Research Center survey,<sup>92</sup> 77 percent of 18-29 year olds said they are interested in local politics, up 28 points from 49 percent in 1999 and the highest increase of any age group tested. The survey also found that 85 percent of 18-29 year olds state they are “interested in keeping up with national affairs,” which is a 14 point increase from 71 percent in 1999 and is almost at the same level of interest of adults of all ages (89 percent). In addition, Millennials who are 18-25 are running about 10 points higher than Gen Xers at the same age on following what’s going on in government and in level of interest in keeping up with national affairs. Finally, in an April 2005 Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (GQR) survey of 18-25 year olds, respondents gave themselves an average of 7 on a 10 point scale on how much they read about politics (higher than the 5.6 they gave themselves on reading about technology).

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<sup>92</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press “Report: A Portrait of Generation Next”; available from <http://peoplepress.org/reports/pdf/300.pdf> and Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research, “Coming of Age in America, Part I” available from [http://www.gqr.com/articles/814/2617\\_COA10605.pdf](http://www.gqr.com/articles/814/2617_COA10605.pdf); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

How does this equate into their partisan voting behavior? Leyden and Teixeira found that Millennials consistently hold generally progressive values by voting more heavily Democratic than other generations in their first few elections.<sup>93</sup> In 2006, 18-29 year olds overall voted 60-38 Democratic in House elections, with the 18-24 year old group going 58-37 Democratic. In 2004, 18-29 year olds (three-fourths of whom would qualify as Millennials) voted 54-45 Democratic for president (55-44 for the House). If one examines even further and exclusively explores just 18-24 year olds (which was entirely Millennials) voted 56-43 Democratic for president while the older 25-29 year old group (generally *not* Millennials) voted only 51-48 Democratic. Even in 2002, which many would consider a bad election for the Democrats, 18-24 year olds (of which almost half would be Millennials) still voted Democratic 49-47.

To further drive this point, Leyden and Teixeira found that according to the Pew Gen Next study,<sup>94</sup> 48 percent of 18-25 year old Millennials now identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party, compared to just 35 percent who identify with or lean toward the Republicans, and there is considerable evidence that that number is continuing to grow. These figures demonstrate a large decrease in support for the Republicans among this age group. In the early 90s, Gen Xers of this age were identifying at a rate of 55 percent Republicans. To this day, Gen Xers remain the most Republican generation,

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<sup>93</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, "Young Voters in the 2006 Elections"; available from <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FSMidterm06.pdf>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>94</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Report: A Portrait of Generation Next"; available from <http://peoplepress.org/reports/pdf/300.pdf>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

while the Millennials are becoming the most Democratic generation. Indeed, on Election Day in 2006, exit polls showed the Democrats with a 12 point lead on party ID among 18-29 year old voters. So why is noting partisan identification important? Numerous studies confirm that party identification and associated voting behavior, once formed in a generation's twenties, tend to persist over their lifetime.

### *The High-Tech, New Media Generation*

Not surprisingly, Millennials are the generation that came of age with the new technologies and new media that are now reshaping American politics. No one understands these new tools better than this group of young people. For example, Leyden and Teixeira<sup>95</sup> found in a May 2006 Young Voter Strategies poll of 18-30 year olds, about 90 percent use email and the internet, 62 percent of whom say they check their email on a daily basis and 70 percent saying they use the internet daily. Over half use the social networking sites, Facebook/MySpace occasionally and about two thirds use IM (Instant Messenger). In terms of daily usage, 18 percent and 28 percent, respectively, use these technologies.

Leyden and Teixeira found even stronger results from a GQR April 2006 survey.<sup>96</sup> Millennial survey respondents reported an average usage rate of 21.3 hours a week online, including using email and IM. In addition in terms of daily usage, 86

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<sup>95</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing Young Voter Strategies, "Young Voter Battleground Poll I"; available from [http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv\\_poll\\_toplines-may-2006.pdf](http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv_poll_toplines-may-2006.pdf); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

<sup>96</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research "Coming of Age in America, Part IV-The MySpace Generation"; available from [http://www.gqrr.com/articles/1699/2620\\_COA40506.pdf](http://www.gqrr.com/articles/1699/2620_COA40506.pdf); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

percent reported using email, 56 percent read news online, 41 percent said they used MySpace, Facebook, or another social networking site, and 40 percent said they used IM. Just over half (52 percent) stated that they have a page on MySpace, while 34 percent said they had one on Facebook. Those numbers have increased considerably since then.

What is the most striking and unique aspect of Millennials' technology usage, Leyden and Teixeira<sup>97</sup> found, is their embrace of mobile media such as text messaging. For example, in a March 2005 Kids World Study survey, 28 percent of 18-24 year olds reported text messaging regularly, compared to 16 percent of 25-34 year olds and just 7 percent of 35-54 year olds. Perhaps even more amazing, in the Pew Gen Next survey, a majority (51 percent) of 18-25 year olds said they had sent or received a text message just in the past 24 hours, compared to 26 percent of those 26-40, 10 percent of 41-60 year olds and just 4 percent among those 61 and over.

In conclusion, this chapter has examined and used generational theory to explore the Millennial generation, young people born between 1982 and 2003, as well compare them to the Greatest generation which was the last example of their generational type. This is in stark contrast to the two generations types which have preceded them. This analysis has shown that this generation is large, tech savvy and thoroughly engaged and thus will have a great impact politically for decades to come.

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<sup>97</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira citing the New Politics Institute, "Mobile Media in 21st Century Politics"; available from <http://www.newpolitics.net/sites/ndn-newpol.civicaactions.net/files/NPI-Mobile-Media-Report.pdf> and Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Report: A Portrait of Generation Next"; available from <http://peoplepress.org/reports/pdf/300.pdf>; Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

The next few chapters will discuss how organizations, partisan and non-partisan, liberal and conservative, work and should work to activate the Millennial generation. Ultimately, there is no question that the way to engage this generation is through a wide array of new media, which will be discussed later in this thesis. However, casual politicians and experts in the field would be advised to not think of Millennials as simply “passive consumers of political media who pull a lever in a voting booth once every two to four years.”<sup>98</sup> They are political actors who will use these new forms of interactive media to help bring about change in this country and around the world. As will be discussed, political campaigns of today are increasingly characterized by “people-powered politics,” using blogs, social network, and videos on YouTube in concert with tried and true field techniques to turn out the vote. In the end, no one knows these tools better than the Millennials.

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<sup>98</sup> Peter Leyden and Ruy Teixeira, “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation: The Emerging Evidence on Why the Younger Generation is Boosting Progressive Prospects for the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century”; The New Politics Institute; available from [http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full\\_report=1](http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full_report=1); Internet; accessed 15 August, 2008.

### CHAPTER THREE: WHO'S WORKING TO ENGAGE YOUNG VOTERS?

In assessing the turnout of Millennials, it is clear that when organizations target youth to engage them in the political process, they participate, therefore, it makes sense to explore what these groups are doing to engage these new voters. However, in order to accurately explore organizational outreach to young voters, it is important to divide the discussion into two group areas: partisan organizations and ideological groups.

#### **The Political Parties**

Both Republicans and Democrats are working hard to attract youth. While there has been little exploration on the topic, one main piece of research on this issue was conducted by Daniel Shea of Allegheny College and John Green at the University of Akron. Their paper “*The Fountain of Youth: Political Parties and the Mobilization of Young Americans*”<sup>99</sup> provides readers with a comprehensive assessment of what the parties are doing to organize youth. This paper is part of a larger book later compiled by Shea and Green that explores organizational outreach to youth and strategies to engage Millennials.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Daniel Shea and John C. Green, “The Fountain of Youth: Political Parties and the Mobilization of Young Americans”; Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth\\_CPP.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth_CPP.pdf); Internet; accessed 17 September, 2008.

<sup>100</sup> Daniel Shea and John C. Green eds., *Fountain of Youth: Strategies and Tactics for Mobilizing America's Young Voters* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

In their paper, Shea and Green<sup>101</sup> surveyed over 800 local party officials to assess what has been done at the local level to truly engage youth. Interestingly, while 86 percent of party leaders agreed that the lack of youth engagement is a problem in this country, very little is being done by the parties to counteract the problem. Young voters are not considered by the local parties to be a part of their long-term success. Similarly, while 41 percent of the leaders stated that the local party had some form of “Get Out the Vote” program targeting youth, most are not very comprehensive. For example, the researchers noted that many officials described their efforts as having party leaders talk to school groups, or setting up information tables at fairs and malls. Few had significant programs to engage youth and overall spent very little of their resources on such projects.

However, there are some important examples of youth engagement at all levels of the party organization that should be explored. The first place to explore efforts to attract youth should be at the national party level. As the Shea and Green explain, in many cases the national committees seem “first off the mark,” with new and exciting programs to attract voters to their respective parties.<sup>102</sup> That innovation is then spread down to the state and local party apparatus. While the work to engage youth should begin at the local level, it is important to explore all levels of engagement by the parties.

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<sup>101</sup> Daniel Shea and John C. Green, “The Fountain of Youth: Political Parties and the Mobilization of Young Americans”; Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth\\_CPP.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth_CPP.pdf); Internet; accessed 17 September, 2008.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

As for youth-centered efforts for the Democratic Party, the College Democrats of America (CDA), the official student arm for the party, is at the forefront. The mission of the organization according to its website is “to train and engage new generations of Democratic activists and shape the Democratic Party with voices from America's youth.”<sup>103</sup> CDA has chapters on more than 2100 campuses with more than 75,000 members in all 50 states. Much of their work has been centered on voter registration and mobilization of voters on college campuses. In terms of voter registration, one unique program, known as the “Get on Board” program, was promoted in 13 states and registered thousands of young voters.<sup>104</sup> The program entailed college campuses registering voters using an ironing board from their dorm room as a table. The other major component of the CDA efforts to attract youth is field work, going door-to-door to encourage young people to vote. In 2006, several key events sponsored by CDA took place. These included the National Youth Canvassing Day where over 4,000 students canvassed in 21 states urging young people to vote, weekend campaign invasions in battleground states, and the National Trick-or-Vote GOTV Canvass.<sup>105</sup> All told, some 25,000 students participated in these activities to push youth to vote Democratic.

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<sup>103</sup> College Democrats of America, “What is CDA”; available from <http://www.collegedems.com/about/whatisca/index.php>; Internet; accessed 24 September, 2008.

<sup>104</sup> Daniel Shea and John C. Green, “The Fountain of Youth: Political Parties and the Mobilization of Young Americans”; Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth\\_CPP.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth_CPP.pdf); Internet; accessed 17 September, 2008.

<sup>105</sup> Democratic National Committee, “36 Days to Go: College Democrats Mobilize to Get Out Youth Vote”; available from [http://www.democrats.org/a/2006/10/36\\_days\\_to\\_go\\_c.php](http://www.democrats.org/a/2006/10/36_days_to_go_c.php); Internet; accessed 15 September, 2008.

In 2008, CDA's main field program was known as the "Precinct Project."<sup>106</sup> In this project, state federations set out to build a national database of student voter information, identifying in each precinct where students will vote. This plan focused on not simply on electing Senator Barack Obama the next president, but also targeted important state and Congressional races to ensure Democratic victory up and down the ballot.

The plan incorporated registration drives and campaign invasions to swing states.<sup>107</sup> The first piece of this plan had a goal to register at least 100,000 students in important swing states key for a Democratic win in 2008. This work began just a few days after the CDA Convention during the Democratic National Convention in Denver, first targeting the incoming class of college freshmen as they arrived on campus but had not yet registered to vote. In the plan, College Democrats chapters also worked to combat barriers to student participation in key states due to early registration deadlines and identification requirements. Registration work first began by launching numerous campus invasions and state partnership projects aimed at registering voters in the key swing states of Nevada, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Florida and North Carolina with a goal of registering 100,000 new voters. These invasions, coordinated by CDA, brought in thousands of student volunteers from states all over the country to those states. By fully implementing CDA's Precinct Project and training leaders to organize voter

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<sup>106</sup> College Democrats of America, "Yes We Can, Yes We Will: College Democrats are Prepared to Mobilize Young People in November"; available from <http://collegedems.com/2008/09/yes-we-can-yes-we-will-college.html>; Internet; accessed 15 September, 2008.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

registration drives, College Democrats hoped that the organization could change the electorate and provide the Democrats with the margin of victory in a number of states (based on early findings discussed later in this thesis, this goal was accomplished).

The other major youth organization working to engage young voters in the Democratic Party is the Young Democrats of America (YDA).<sup>108</sup> Founded in 1932, the 150,000 member strong organization has over 1500 local chapters in 43 states and territories. While considered the official youth arm of the Democratic Party, YDA has operated independently of the DNC since 2002 as a 527 organization.<sup>109</sup> Since the 2004 election, YDA has run a youth coordinated campaign. The goals for the program are to increase the number of young people voting for Democrats and to create a model that keeps young people involved in politics. The field program consists of both paid staff and volunteer canvassers. Areas in a given state are targeted if they have a collective population of 30 percent or more young people. In particular, the program targets young people not currently enrolled in a traditional 4-year college or university. The canvassers then engage in peer-to-peer techniques, such as door-to-door contact, phone calls, and organizing voter registration and visibility events at sites where young people congregate, in order to engage young voters. Analysis of the program found in 2004 that these

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<sup>108</sup> Young Democrats of America, "About YDA"; available from <http://www.yda.org/about>; Internet; accessed 15 September, 2008.

<sup>109</sup> According to the Federal Election Commission website, "entities organized under section 527 of the tax code are considered "political organizations," defined generally as a party, committee or association that is organized and operated primarily for the purpose of influencing the selection, nomination or appointment of any individual to any federal, state or local public office, or office in a political organization."

activities added an extra 5-12% to Democratic turnout in targeted precincts. In 2006, YDA implemented the program in 6 states, contacting over 100,000 young voters. In 2008, this work expanded to 12 states with smaller partnership programs, working on the same model, in additional states.

The Democrats have also made a number of efforts to utilize the power of the internet to encourage participation. For example, in 2004, the DNC created the webpage “democrat.meetup.com” designed after Howard Dean’s success with Meetup.Org.<sup>110</sup> Young voters could sign up to be “eCaptains” and build an online group of activists to help turn out young voters in their area. The DNC, CDA, and YDA also have blogs on their web pages to provide news and information on the party’s activities targeted to youth.

New to the DNC in 2008 was the creation of the PartyBuilder system on the party’s main website.<sup>111</sup> PartyBuilder is billed as a “set of online tools designed to empower Democrats to take control of the future of their party.”<sup>112</sup> The system allows users to use online technology to engage in offline activities such as canvassing, phone banking and other engagement events. As in other social networking sites, individual users control most of the activity, from blogging, to setting up and managing groups of

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<sup>110</sup> Daniel Shea and John C. Green, “The Fountain of Youth: Political Parties and the Mobilization of Young Americans”; Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth\\_CPP.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth_CPP.pdf); Internet; accessed 17 September, 2008.

<sup>111</sup> Democratic National Committee, “PartyBuilder”; available from <http://www.democrats.org/page/content/partybuilder/>; Internet; accessed 18 September, 2008.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

activists, to organizing and managing real-world events, to fundraising. The party is entrusting the members of PartyBuilder to build the space and by extension the Party.

There are several key tools that make up the PartyBuilder application.<sup>113</sup> These include: a user dashboard that pulls data from all tools into one interface as well as a social networking tool that allows for people to connect with one another. The site also has a search tool which let's users find each other or find established groups based on name or zip code. With the "groups tool," members are able to join together for an issue, cause, or candidate. Users can then share a common blog, events management system, and listserv. The "events tool" allows users to create real-world events of any kind. There is also a personal fundraising system on PartyBuilder along with a "letters tool" that easily connects users with the editors of their local newspapers. The tool also provides talking points for a range of issues to include in the letter. Finally, the program has a "blog creation tool" for each user, complete with full management control and commenting functionality.

Finally, it is important to note that the Democrats have translated their efforts to mobilize young voters to pushing for issues in the halls of Congress. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi has consistently made youth issues a priority in her office. She has one full-time staff member who is her advisor on youth issues. This staff member is given the charge of promoting the Democratic Caucus's efforts to better the lives of young people. The office has also created an e-newsletter called the "Pelosi 411," which

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

is sent to inform young people on proposals the Democrats are working on to impact youth. Additionally, Pelosi has created the “30-Something” Working Group. The group consists of 14 Democratic members of the House of Representatives who are under the age of 40. The group is “committed to engaging the next generation of Americans further in government and the political process.”<sup>114</sup>

The Republican leadership in Congress does not have staff or a working group designed to encourage focus on issues important to youth; however, not surprisingly, the Republican Party has also worked in other ways to engage young people in the political process because they see, as the Democrats do, that young people are critical to party’s long-term success. The party efforts in the 2004 presidential election centered around voter registration efforts and efforts to attract support at the nation’s college campuses. While the party did not host specific events geared toward young people, they did take advantage of outside opportunities. For example, the party sent staff to setup voter registration and information tables at concerts and other events, including contemporary Christian concerts.<sup>115</sup>

According the Shea and Green,<sup>116</sup> another unique registration tool the RNC operated in 2004 was “Reggie” the Voter Registration Rig, which was sent to events

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<sup>114</sup> Office of the U.S. Speaker of the House, “30-Something Working Group”; available from <http://speaker.house.gov/communities?id=0001>; Internet; accessed 18 September, 2008.

<sup>115</sup> Daniel Shea and John C. Green, “The Fountain of Youth: Political Parties and the Mobilization of Young Americans”; Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth\\_CPP.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth_CPP.pdf); Internet; accessed 17 September, 2008.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

around the country. The rig was a 56-foot truck that served as a mobile voter registration table. “Reggie” assisted the party in registering almost 3 million new voters. The rig usually appeared at sporting events, (including NASCAR races and minor league baseball games), college campuses, and other public events. The rig had televisions, Xbox systems, and DirectTV programming, all designed to provide an entertaining environment while at the same time informing and encouraging voter participation in the Republican Party.

Not directly affiliated with the national party due to its status as a 527 organization, the College Republican National Committee (CRNC) provides the bulk of the work to attract youth to vote for the Republicans.<sup>117</sup> College Republicans is billed as the “nation's oldest, largest, and most active youth political organization.” Founded in 1892, there are currently over 250,000 CR's around the country on 1,800+ campuses in every state and the District of Columbia. The organization runs two main cornerstone programs. The signature Field Program sends full-time representatives to recruit, train, register, and mobilize the organization’s membership nationwide. New to CRNC in 2008 is the Wildfire activism program which engages students in social-mobilization efforts to capture the online “energy” of College Republicans.

The field program hires and sends staff to college campuses all over the country.<sup>118</sup> Started in the 1980’s, staff are in charge of organizing new clubs as well as

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<sup>117</sup> College Republicans National Committee, “The CRNC Team”; available from <http://cnc.org/team.php>; Internet; accessed 18 September, 2008.

<sup>118</sup> College Republicans National Committee, “The History of the Field Program”; available from <http://www.cnc.org/index.php?content=FieldHist.>; Internet; accessed 15 September, 2008.

registering, recruiting, and training college students to vote for republican candidates and work on campaigns. In 2004, CRNC hired 56 full-time field staff coordinated by four field managers.<sup>119</sup> The organization’s staff recruited more than 52,000 new members and created over 250 new chapters. They also registered 37,000 new voters and recruited over 16,000 volunteers to work on campaigns up and down the ballot. In 2006, CRNC hired 31 field staffers including two staffers whose specific role was to organize Republican chapters at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).<sup>120</sup> In 2008, CRNC deployed 50 field representatives in thirty-one states.<sup>121</sup> They worked on campuses until the November elections recruiting new College Republican members and registering students to vote. New to 2008, the field staff incorporated their traditional grassroots efforts with online activism tools, such as blogs, YouTube, and Twitter. Their goal was to recruit 100,000 new members and register 25,000 new voters before Election Day.

The other party-aligned youth group for the Republican Party is the Young Republicans (YRs).<sup>122</sup> They are the oldest political youth organization in the United States. YRs reach out to registered Republicans, 18 to 40 years of age, and provide them

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<sup>119</sup> College Republican National Committee, “Past Field Programs”; available from <http://www.crtc.org/index.php?content=PastField>; Internet; accessed 15 September, 2008.

<sup>120</sup> College Republican National Committee, “2006 Fall Field Program”; available from <http://www.crtc.org/index.php?content=Fall2006>; Internet; accessed 15 September, 2008.

<sup>121</sup> CR Nation: News for College Republicans, “Field Rep Allocation”; available from <http://crnation.com/2008/08/25/field-rep-allocation/>; Internet; accessed 16 September, 2008.

<sup>122</sup> Young Republican National Federation, “About”; available from <http://www.yrnf.com/about>; Internet; accessed 1 October, 2008.

with better political knowledge of the party and understanding of the issues. The first organized effort of the YRs began in 1859; three years after the Republican Party selected its first presidential candidate. A year later, they were instrumental in helping elect Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican President in American history. However, it was not until 1931 that the organization was organized nationally, when President Herbert Hoover asked West Point graduate George H. Olmsted to head the Young Republican division of the Republican Party. In 1935, the Young Republican division officially became the Young Republican National Federation (YRNF), and the YRNF elected Olmsted as the organization's first president. Since its inception, the YRNF has worked to established itself as the premier Republican grassroots organization in the nation, providing essential grassroots support for Republican candidates and conservative issues on the local, state and national levels.

While much of the organization devoted its time to typical activities volunteering on campaigns and pushing for greater membership among young professionals, the YRNF has made a push to incorporate more technology into the political process with the creation of the website, [thisismyparty.org](http://thisismyparty.org). Thisismyparty.org was created by the Young Republicans because they felt that the internet would be the best format to discuss how the Republican Party “provides the means for young Americans to meet their needs today and preserve their future.”<sup>123</sup> Up to this point, the organization was concerned with the general silence from Republican members of their own generation. They believed the

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<sup>123</sup> Young Republican National Federation, “This is My Party- About”; available from <http://www.thisismyparty.org/about/>; Internet; accessed 5 October 2008.

consequences of that silence would be dire for the 2008 Presidential election and elections to come. The website allows users to post blog entries describing their reasons for supporting the Republican Party. Members are also able to submit blog postings describing their own story of how the Republican Party benefits their lives.

In comparison to the Democrats, it is important to note that the Republicans do not have a similar peer-to-peer program to target youth not in a college or university. Additionally, until the 2008 election, the internet was not as widely used as an organizing tool by Republicans in contrast to the Democrats. In 2004, the RNC included campaign videos, games, and political cartoons on their website geared toward young viewer, but little else. However in 2008, the RNC created a new networking tool on their website called myGOP.<sup>124</sup> Billed by the RNC as “the next generation of political organizing,” members first setup their own personal website on GOP.com with a personalized message and photos. MyGOP, as the PartyBuilder tool does for the Democrats, allows users to network for other likeminded users, raise funds for the Republican Party, organize local events, and encourage friends to register to vote. There is also a tool to allow users to find local talk radio stations along with talking points that individuals can use on air.

There is no doubt that while the national parties are working to try to attract youth to their cause, it is equally important that energy is extended to the state and local party organizations. Unfortunately, youth engagement activities are not extensively at the

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<sup>124</sup> Republican National Committee, “Welcome to MyGOP”; available from <http://staging.gop.com/MyGop/Default.aspx>; Internet; accessed 18 September, 2008.

forefront of efforts at the local level for either major party. However, Shea and Green<sup>125</sup> describe a few bright examples where state and local party organizations are taking significant steps to encourage young people to get involved.

One of the strongest efforts they discuss at the state level to encourage youth voting was run by the Michigan Democratic Party.<sup>126</sup> Beginning in 2002, the party's youth caucus began the Youth Coordinated Campaign. This campaign was sponsored and paid for by the state party, rather than as an activity performed by a 527 organization that cannot officially be coordinated with the party. The campaign contacted more than 98,000 young voters aged 18 to 35 over the course of the 2002 election cycle. The youth campaign staff and volunteers called more than 24,000 young people, knocked on over 14,000 doors and placed "get out the vote" door hangers at more than 60,000 youth homes. The overall cost of the 13 staff member campaign was just under \$54,000 in the months leading up to Election Day. Additionally, the Wisconsin Democratic Party has created a unique and innovative program called the Democratic Leadership Institute (DLI). The program brings in about 150 young people from across the state to learn about the Democratic Party, politics, and the mechanics of campaigns. At a cost of \$15,000 per year, the program is creating a group of young activists who will become the county chairs, campaign workers, and elected officials of tomorrow.

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<sup>125</sup> Daniel Shea and John C. Green, "The Fountain of Youth: Political Parties and the Mobilization of Young Americans"; Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth\\_CPP.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/Fountain%20Youth_CPP.pdf); Internet; accessed 17 September, 2008.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

According to Shea and Green,<sup>127</sup> Republicans have also worked at the state party level to get young people involved in the party. In Mississippi, the party achieved their goal of organizing college groups at every college and community college in the state. They also offer classes for young activists on how to run a successful campaign, including innovative classes on producing TV and radio spots. The party utilizes staff and outside experts to teach these courses. Finally, the party has an extensive internship program, hiring at least 14 students each year to work throughout the year. In Maryland, the Republican Party had a goal of registering 25,000 new voters and made that push for voters on college campuses around the state. They provide tickets to major fundraisers and made events available to young people at reduced rates.

Additionally, as Shea and Green<sup>128</sup> describe, while even fewer local parties have extensive youth programs, some have found unique ways to get more young people to the polls. For example, in Orange County, North Carolina, the Democratic Party has made a distinctive effort to integrate youth into the party. First, the party provides funding for any activities that the Young Democrats group wants to be involved in, ranging from voter registration drives to campaign invasions locally and statewide. The party is also creating a comprehensive database with accurate contact information for all registered voters in the county. While contacting voters, one of the questions asked is to determine if there are young people in the home unregistered. If so, the party provides voter

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

registration forms and monitors the voter registration rolls to make sure the young person registers. If they don't, the party will persistently call them back. Finally, the party also provides vans at the UNC-Chapel Hill campus on Election Day, along with laptops for students to check to see where they vote, to make sure young voters have a ride to the three different polling locations on-campus students vote.

Additionally, Shea and Green<sup>129</sup> found that in New Mexico, the Ontero County Republican Party has developed a unique scholarship program to encourage high school students to participate. The "Tigers, Knowledge, Activities," or TKA, scholarship program is cosponsored by the party, a local newspaper, and a youth radio station in the county. Each week, 25 to 30 students submit an application to be considered for the scholarship. The winner received numerous prizes and was recognized in a classroom presentation as well as in an ad broadcast throughout the day on the radio. At the end of the year, one student was chosen from the weekly winners to receive a \$500 prize.

### **Ideological Groups**

There are two types of ideological groups, each with different goals. One relates to issue advocacy while engaging young people outside of the ballot box. Others are simply designed to turnout likeminded young people to the polls on Election Day. This thesis will discuss both efforts of outreach to youth.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

## *Conservative*

Both types of these organizations are prevalent in the conservative movement. According to the Roosevelt Institution's study of the conservative youth movement,<sup>130</sup> issue-oriented groups on the right have centered on one central theme: that funding student activism and training are the future of the conservative movement. A key component in successfully building this infrastructure has been financial resources provided by foundations and other conservative organizations. In addition to receiving funding from conservative foundations and trusts, these organizations are supported by individual conservative donors as well. Conservative youth organizations have an annual operating budget totaling over \$40 million. Two of these organizations will be examined: Young Americas Foundation (as we mentioned earlier in this thesis) and the Leadership Institute. Three organizations, Redeem the Vote, Conservative Punk and the Christian Youth Voter Project, fall into the second category of youth outreach: electoral activity.

As stated earlier, the main goal of the Young Americas Foundation (YAF) is to provide basic training, internship opportunities, and general support to campus conservatives. The organization publishes two main books to accomplish this goal.<sup>131</sup> *The Conservative Guide to Campus Activism* and the *Campus Conservative Battle Plan* are detailed training manuals that are used to help young people become successful

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<sup>130</sup> The Roosevelt Institution, "The Conservative Youth Movement"; available from [http://rooseveltinstitution.org/about/toolbox/\\_file/\\_conservative\\_youth\\_movement\\_analysis.pdf](http://rooseveltinstitution.org/about/toolbox/_file/_conservative_youth_movement_analysis.pdf); Internet; accessed 20 September, 2008.

<sup>131</sup> Young American Foundation, "Two Activism Guides to Change Your Campus"; available from <http://yaf.org/students/activists/battleplan/index.cfm>; Internet; accessed 20 September, 2008.

advocates for the conservative cause. The *Campus Activism Guide* provides student movement building skills, such as how to create or reenergize a conservative club on campus, promoting events, getting media attention, and avoid common mistakes of campus activism such as “appeasing the left” or breaking college rules concerning student organizations. The *Campus Battle Plan* provides basic specific activism ideas that students can organize each month of the school year including how to: “remember those murdered in the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks; celebrate Freedom Week; take part in American Pride Day; end divisive race-based programs on campus; and adopt the Ronald Reagan Model of Campus Activism.” According to the Roosevelt Institution,<sup>132</sup> last year, YAF facilitated bringing over 200 conservative speakers to campuses across America. Additionally, YAF’s National Journalism Center has produced over 1,400 conservative authors, who have published over 100 books.

YAF is not alone in providing training to young conservatives. The Leadership Institute's mission is to increase the number and effectiveness of conservative public policy leaders. Founded by Morton C. Blackwell, the Institute produces “leaders for a new generation of public policy leadership who share a commitment to free enterprise, limited government and traditional values and are equipped with the practical skills to implement sound philosophy through effective public policy.”<sup>133</sup> The Institute offers a

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<sup>132</sup> The Roosevelt Institution, “The Conservative Youth Movement”; available from [http://rooseveltinstitute.org/about/toolbox/\\_file/\\_conservative\\_youth\\_movement\\_analysis.pdf](http://rooseveltinstitute.org/about/toolbox/_file/_conservative_youth_movement_analysis.pdf); Internet; accessed 20 September, 2008.

<sup>133</sup> The Leadership Institute, “History/Mission”; available from <http://www.leadershipinstitute.org/AboutUS/?PageID=history>; Internet; accessed 20 September, 2008.

number of educational programs, an intern program, an Employment Placement Service and a Broadcast Journalism Placement Service to train young conservatives and then place them in public policy positions. The training programs center around a wide range of topics such as: Broadcast Journalism, Campaign Leadership, Candidate Development, Capitol Hill Staff training, Grassroots Activism, Internet Activism, Public Speaking, Student Publications, and Youth Leadership.<sup>134</sup> Last year alone over 3500 student took part in the Institute's training programs. A second component of the Institute is its Campus Leadership program which provides students with funding to support their efforts on campus, similar to what groups might receive from the student government.<sup>135</sup> In the last four years, over 1000 conservative groups have received funding.

Redeem the Vote is an organization founded by Randy Brinson during the 2004 presidential campaign to register young, evangelical Christians to vote.<sup>136</sup> Brinson founded Redeem the Vote in 2003 with \$300,000 of his own money. Redeem the Vote enlists Contemporary Christian music groups to register young evangelicals and promote political participation. Sponsors of this organization include: Sean Hannity and Fox News, the American Tract Society, Focus on the Family, FamilyNet and the Gospel

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<sup>134</sup> The Leadership Institute, "Training"; available from <http://www.leadershipinstitute.org/Training/>; Internet; accessed 20 September, 2008.

<sup>135</sup> The Leadership Institute's Campus Leadership Program, available from <http://www.campusleadership.org/NFP/>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

<sup>136</sup> Redeem the Vote, "R. Randolph "Randy" Brinson"; available from <http://www.redeemthevote.com/randybrinsonbio.html>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

Music Association.<sup>137</sup> During the 2004 election season, the group estimated it registered 78,000 voters based on the 30,000 forms distributed at concerts and 40,000 over the Internet. Meanwhile, its email list reached 12 million by Election Day 2004.<sup>138</sup> During the 2008 Republican nomination, Redeem the Vote partnered with the Mike Huckabee campaign. RTV now claims to have 71 million email addresses, 25 million belonging to "25 and 45 years old, upwardly mobile, right-of-center, conservative households."<sup>139</sup>

Another group working to engage conservative youth is the Christian Youth Voter Project (CYVP).<sup>140</sup> This is a project of the Citizen Leader Coalition which is "dedicated to restoring America's constitutional government and founding principles." As the name and mission implies, this organization is making a direct attempt to register and engage evangelical youth in electoral politics. With a focus on conservative voters of faith in college, first-time Christian voters in 10 battleground states in 2004 were targeted first by sending direct mail to Christian colleges and universities, encouraging youth to visit the organization website. They also allowed and encouraged articles published on the website to be replicated in conservative publications on college campuses. Using these

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<sup>137</sup> Redeem the Vote. "Redeem Partners." Available from [http://www.redeemthevote.com/redeem\\_partners.html](http://www.redeemthevote.com/redeem_partners.html) Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

<sup>138</sup> Hanna Rosin, "Redeem the Vote Spreads The Election-Year Gospel," *Washington Post*. 29 October 2004; available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A7482-2004Oct28?language=printer>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

<sup>139</sup> Chris Cillizza and Shailagh Murray, "The Man Who Helped Start Huckabee's Roll," *Washington Post*, 27 December 2004; available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/01/AR2007120101569.html>; Internet: accessed 21 September, 2008.

<sup>140</sup> Daniel M. Shea and John C. Green, eds., *Fountain of Youth: Strategies and Tactics for Mobilizing America's Young Voters* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 196-197.

methods the CYVP was able to “educate, register, and mobilize Christian Youth all across America.” While not releasing exact registration figures, the CYVP was seen as one of the more successful efforts in 2004 to engage youth of faith.

According to Shea and Green,<sup>141</sup> CYVP is currently in the process of continuing to mobilize young, Christian conservatives. Through a program called CVOTER.com, the organization again targeted key, battleground states. However, unlike in 2004, CYVP expanded their registration efforts by building a volunteer organization that established groups on Christian college campuses by using churches and Christian school to distribute registration information, and by encouraging students at college or in the military to vote absentee.

Finally, as an attempt to combat the belief that listeners and supporters of punk rock music were supporters of the Democrats, Nick Rizzuto created Conservative Punk.com in 2003.<sup>142</sup> Rizzuto created the website in order to motivate young people to register to vote as well as inspire youth to think independently about the choices they make on Election Day. He also created the website to discredit the claim that “punk” voters automatically side with liberal candidates by working to inform young people of conservative ideals in punk music. The website contained a forum where young, conservative “punk voters” could express their thoughts and ideals. There was also the ability for people to download music from conservative punk bands and find articles

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 196-197.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 188.

written by conservative authors. Finally, the site provides readers with links and assistance on how to register to vote.

### *Liberal/Progressive*

There are also a growing number of progressive/liberal organizations that are cropping up to counteract a well-funded effort by conservatives. One important item to note is that in many ways they are playing “catch up” to the right. They are in a financial disadvantage to the conservatives by a factor of four to one.<sup>143</sup> However, their growth even under these conditions cannot be ignored. As in their counterparts on the right, progressive organizations also fall within the two spheres of youth outreach: issue advocacy and electoral politics. In terms of issues based organizations, Campus Progress, a youth division of the Center for American Progress, and Young People For (YP4) will be explored. In addition, the electoral activity of several left-leaning organizations including: The League of Young Voters, Black Youth Vote!, and the Bus Project (formally known as the Oregon Bus Project) will also be examined.

Campus Progress,<sup>144</sup> launched in February 2005, is an American non-profit non-partisan organization that aims to support the activism and journalism of young people in the United States who support progressive policies. Based at the Center for American Progress in Washington, Campus Progress has worked with young people on more than

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<sup>143</sup> The Roosevelt Institution, “The Conservative Youth Movement”; available from [http://rooseveltinstitution.org/about/toolbox/\\_file/\\_conservative\\_youth\\_movement\\_analysis.pdf](http://rooseveltinstitution.org/about/toolbox/_file/_conservative_youth_movement_analysis.pdf); Internet; accessed 20 September, 2008.

<sup>144</sup> Campus Progress, Center for American Progress, “About Campus Progress;” Available from <http://www.campusprogress.org/about>; Internet; accessed 21 September 21, 2008.

500 U.S. college campuses and in communities around the United States. Campus Progress has 20 full-time staff and about 10 interns.<sup>145</sup> David Halperin, former speechwriter to President Clinton and to former Governor Howard Dean, has served as the director of Campus Progress since its inception. Campus Progress also has a student network presently comprised of 140 representatives, 10 chapters, and 15 student advisory board members. Campus Progress has programs in journalism, activism, and events. In all three areas, Campus Progress has a national component and a local component.

On the journalism front, Campus Progress has a national web/print magazine, CampusProgress.org magazine, as well as a campus publications network that provide support to progressive leaning publications on local campuses. CampusProgress.org magazine is written by young people and is primarily focused on journalism, analysis, opinions, cartoons, videos, and organizing tools.<sup>146</sup> Articles include reports on youth activism, reviews of films and music, and interviews with well-known individuals. Campus Progress also distributes a print edition of its web magazine on college campuses and at events.<sup>147</sup> In terms of its local support, the organization supports progressive-leaning student publications on more than fifty campuses including Claremont McKenna

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<sup>145</sup> Campus Progress, Center for American Progress, “Who We Are”; available from <http://www.campusprogress.org/about/1737/who-we-are>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

<sup>146</sup> Campus Progress, Center for American Progress, “About Campus Progress”; available from <http://www.campusprogress.org/about>; Internet; accessed 21 September 21, 2008.

<sup>147</sup> Campus Progress, Center for American Progress, “How to Write for Campus Progress”; available from <http://www.campusprogress.org/about/85/contribute-to-campusprogressorg>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

College, the University of Houston, Michigan State University, Vanderbilt University, and Dartmouth College.<sup>148</sup>

In terms of issue advocacy, Campus Progress works on national issue campaigns, including student debt and access to higher education, the Iraq war, climate change, affirmative action, and academic freedom.<sup>149</sup> Campus Progress advocates on behalf of young people by lobbying Congress and state governments as well as producing media content, trainings, and other work with young people to advance their stances on these issues. The organization also provides action grants to young activists engaging in campaigns on a variety of issues. Action grants include financial support, advice, support, and training. Some training has focused on teaching young people how to effectively communicate in the media. Action grants have also addressed a wide range of issues including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights; climate change; Sudan divestment; living wages; fair trade; and the death penalty.

Campus Progress has worked with students and other partners to hold more than 300 speaking programs, film screenings, debates, training programs, and social events.<sup>150</sup> Events have included discussions on HIV/AIDS, academic freedom, the war in Iraq, and climate change. These events are held at colleges and universities as well as in

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<sup>148</sup> Campus Progress, Center for American Progress, “Campus Progress Publications”; available from <http://www.campusprogress.org/tools/90/campus-progress-publications>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

<sup>149</sup> Campus Progress, Center for American Progress, “Issues + Activism;” available from <http://www.campusprogress.org/issues/1457/activism>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

<sup>150</sup> Campus Progress, Center for American Progress. “Campus Progress Events.” Available from <http://www.campusprogress.org/events>. Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

communities across the country. Campus Progress also has taken its work on tour with the Foo Fighters, and to music festivals including Bonnaroo, Intonation, and Virgin. The highlight of their events outreach is the organization's National Conference, held each July in Washington.

Campus Progress has an affiliated advocacy organization, "Campus Progress Action."<sup>151</sup> Campus Progress Action engages in advocacy, coalition, and media work on key policy issues of importance to progressive young people; advances grassroots issue campaigns on campuses and in communities; and trains young people in media, policy, writing, grassroots organizing, and other skills. They have recently engaged in organizing around the 2008 youth vote during the presidential nominating contests and general election by hosting events and speaking with the press. In spring 2008, the organization launched a new project, "I'm Voting For," to highlight issues of importance to young people and bring them to the attention of the media and candidates for President. The "I'm Voting For" site includes video testimonials of young people talking about how their personal experiences, ideas, and values are driving them to the polls in 2008.

The Center for American Progress is not the only progressive-leaning organization with a youth division. In 2004, People For the American Way launched a strategic, long-term leadership initiative, Young People For (YP4), to invest in the next generation of leaders and build a long-term national network for young progressives. Led

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<sup>151</sup> Campus Progress, Center for American Progress. "Campus Progress Action." Available from <http://campusprogressaction.org/>. Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

by Ira Peng, YP4 serves “motivated, socially aware, diverse and creative young adults who are emerging leaders in their communities, and works with them to create positive change in their communities while empowering the newest generations of skilled, progressive leaders who will lead with progressive values, make progress in their communities today, and create sustainable change over the long term.”<sup>152</sup> The organization offers numerous resources, guidance and a wide variety of ongoing opportunities for young leaders to connect with other progressive leaders, plan and execute projects in their communities, and gain valuable leadership, communication, organizing, collaboration and advocacy skills.

One of the signature programs of YP4 is the fellowship program.<sup>153</sup> The YP4 fellowship is a leadership development program focusing on identifying, engaging, and empowering young progressive leaders. The one-year fellowship equips college students with the skills and resources necessary to create lasting change on their campuses and in their communities. The organization selects roughly 200 students from across the country to take part in the fellowship program each year. Fellows receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington to attend the annual YP4’s National Summit for Young Progressive Leaders. At the Summit, fellows meet other young progressive leaders from all over the country and learn powerful strategies and tactics for creating sustainable social change.

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<sup>152</sup> Young People For, “About YP4”; available from <http://www.youngpeoplefor.org/about>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

<sup>153</sup> Young People For, “The Fellowship”; available from <http://www.youngpeoplefor.org/programs/fellowship>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

Additionally, fellows are also offered financial support, technical support and media assistance while implementing a self-designed “Blueprint for Social Justice.”<sup>154</sup> These blueprints range from work to combat discrimination in the LGBT community to young voter empowerment to making fraternity and sorority houses more environmentally friendly. In addition to support for the Blueprint, fellows will also receive help with internship placements, job opportunities, travel opportunities, and networking opportunities to aid in their ability to make an impact as a young leader.

In terms of training resources, Young People For provides a number of resources to aid young progressives in promoting their values and reaching their long-term leadership goals. The Progressive Academy Online provides free, flexible education about real-world skills and concepts relevant to pursuing a career in the progressive movement.<sup>155</sup> These online training videos allow interested parties the access to training regardless of where they live or go to school. Written by YP4 fellows, “Little Black Books” are skill-based guides for student leaders.<sup>156</sup> These books provide information on a wide range of topics including lobbying, event planning, and coalition building. YP4 also provides Toolkits which give wealth of information on the issues that fellows are

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<sup>154</sup> Young People For, “Blueprint Summaries”; available from <http://www.youngpeoplefor.org/fellows/blueprints/summaries>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008

<sup>155</sup> Young People For, “Progressive Academy Online”; available from <http://www.youngpeoplefor.org/resources/pao>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

<sup>156</sup> Young People For, “Little Black Books”; available from <http://www.youngpeoplefor.org/resources/blackbooks>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

working on.<sup>157</sup> Toolkits include issue overviews, case studies and resources for learning more and getting involved. Finally, the organization also publishes strategy papers to provide insight on the future for the progressive movement.

The second type of youth-oriented organizations is also found on the progressive side of political spectrum. The League of Young Voters, founded in 2003, has become one of the strongest youth organizations in the country fighting for progressive change. The organization works to engage young people nationwide to participate in the democratic process and create progressive political change on the local, state, and national level, with a particular focus on non-college youth and youth from low-income communities as well as communities of color. The League “makes political engagement relevant by meeting young people where they are, working on issues that affect their lives, and providing them with tools, training, and support to become serious catalysts for change in their communities.”<sup>158</sup>

The League’s<sup>159</sup> “integrated youth civic engagement model” combines best practices from community, campus and cultural organizing with tried and true voter engagement techniques. During election seasons, the organization runs targeted data-driven, precinct-based voter contact and turnout programs. In 2008, the League’s field program consisted of get-out-the-vote (GOTV) programs, issue campaigns, lobbying and

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<sup>157</sup> Young People For, “YP4 Toolkits”; available from <http://www.youngpeoplefor.org/resources/toolkits>; Internet; accessed 21 September, 2008.

<sup>158</sup> The League of Young Voters, “About the League”; available from <http://theleague.com/about>; Internet; accessed 22 September, 2008.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

GOTV experiments.<sup>160</sup> They had field operations on the ground in crucial states across the country, including Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Maine, Ohio, Florida, Missouri, California, and Minnesota. Each state conducted an integrated voter engagement program to elect progressive candidates up and down the ballot; however, the organization worked on key issues unique to each state. For example, the Pennsylvania League focused on voter protection, juvenile justice, and green jobs at the local and state level. The Maine League, however, worked on issues such as affordable housing and transportation. Additionally, the Maine chapter worked on energy and climate change, the youth anti-war movement, and helped to ensure successful implementation of Opportunity Maine. Finally in Ohio, the League focused on college access and affordability, economic justice, and social justice issues.

The League is in a unique position, as they are working to become a more issue-based organization rather than strictly one focused on electoral politics. The organization is working to incorporate the “permanent campaign” approach (year round, long-term, locally-driven), which they see as key to building the “trust, skills, and power necessary to not only increase young voter turnout in the short term, but to leverage long-term change and form a generation of engaged and active young leaders.”<sup>161</sup> The League is working to accomplish this during the off election season by focusing on organizing around issues of importance to young people. By focusing on relevant local issues like

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<sup>160</sup> The League of Young Voters, “The League in 2008”; available from <http://theleague.com/2008>; Internet; accessed 22 September, 2008.

<sup>161</sup> The League of Young Voters, “About the League”; available from <http://theleague.com/about>. Internet; accessed 22 September, 2008.

juvenile justice, voting rights, electoral reform, green jobs, access to education and climate change, the organization is attempting to engage and mobilize new and drop-off voters who would otherwise not be active in off-election years.

In moving toward a long-term vision to build infrastructure, the League is also experimenting with network-based national programs and initiatives. Their best known national pilot is their online voter guide tool, TheBallot.org, which provided more than 270 voter guides and voter slates in 33 states. Local groups can also make their own voter guides online via this tool. The League also supplies an in-house leadership training program which includes a host of trainings for beginners, a five-day electoral and issue based boot camp called the “Tunnel Builder Institute,” a 10-week experiential training course; and site-based apprenticeship placements. These training programs have a goal of developing a pipeline of new leaders for the League and other youth organizations.

Another group in the fight for young voters on the left is Black Youth Vote! (BYV!).<sup>162</sup> BYV! is a national grassroots coalition of organizations and individuals committed to increasing political and civic involvement among Black men and women aged 18-35. Founded in 1996 by members of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, BYV! came out of the organization’s desire to reach out and educate all segments of the youth population including high school, college, and incarcerated youth. Additionally, as Black youth under 35 represent nearly 50% of the Black American

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<sup>162</sup> Black Youth Vote!, “About BYV;” available from <http://www.ncbcp.org/byv/about.html>; Internet; accessed 22 September, 2008.

electorate, coalition members saw that youth empowerment is the key to impacting the many serious problems confronting the Black community. The organization seeks to empower Black youth by educating them about the political process as well as training them to identify issues and influence public policy through participation.

For ten years, BYV! has engaged and trained a new generation of civic leaders and political activists.<sup>163</sup> Through BYV!, students, community advocates, and young professionals have gained critical tools that enable them to lead their communities to participate fully in the democratic process, focused on attaining greater social and economic justice in the Black Community. BYV! identifies campus and community based youth-focused organizations and engages their youth leaders on the effects of the political and civic process. They also develop tactics to increase youth civic engagement including: civic education, issue education, voter registration, message development, voter mobilization, voter protection and accountability.

Finally, one of the more unique progressive youth groups is the known as the Bus Project.<sup>164</sup> The Bus Project is a volunteer-driven, non-profit organization that engages young people in progressive politics and issues within the state of Oregon. The Bus Project defines progressive issues to include "the 6 E's": Education, Equal Rights, Economic Strength and Fairness, Election Reform, Environment, and [H]ealth Care.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> The Bus Project, "About"; available from <http://busproject.org/about/>; Internet; accessed 23 September, 2008.

<sup>165</sup> The Bus Project, "The 6 E's"; available from <http://busproject.org/about/the-6-es/>; Internet; accessed 23 September, 2008.

Founded in 2001 by Jefferson Smith, the Bus Project has mobilized thousands of volunteers and activists around the state of Oregon. In the 2004 election, Bus volunteers canvassed numerous voters around the state, which many have contribute to the state Senate switching from Republican to Democratic control. In the 2006 elections, the House of Representatives flipped to Democratic control following the work of the Bus Project.

The Bus Project conducts several forms of voter engagement programs in addition to the statewide bus tour promoting progressive candidates. Building Votes<sup>166</sup> is the voter registration arm of the Bus Project. It aims to assist citizens under 30 years old to register, vote, and educate themselves about issues and politics. In the 2006 election cycle, Building Votes registered 20,000 new voters in Oregon, increasing the size of the overall under-30 electorate in Oregon by 6 percent. Trick or Vote,<sup>167</sup> a canvass conducted on Halloween, turned out over 800 people to volunteer for half a day in 2004, and over 500 for the mid-term election in 2006. A mass costume canvass to get out the vote is followed by an evening of entertainment and music. The program expanded in numerous states in the 2008 elections.

The Bus project is also working to provide training for the next generation of young activists. PolitiCorps,<sup>168</sup> the Bus Project's fellowship program, is a political

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<sup>166</sup> The Bus Project., "Building Votes"; available from <http://busproject.org/programs/building-votes/>; Internet; accessed 23 September, 2008.

<sup>167</sup> Trick or Vote, available from <http://www.trickorvote.org/>; Internet; accessed 23 September, 2008.

<sup>168</sup> PolitiCrops, available from <http://www.politicorps.org/>; Internet; accessed 23 September, 2008.

immersion program that provides future leaders with skills training, policy courses and intensive fieldwork. Courses include campaign management training, public speaking and debate, political messaging, and media courses. Fellows in the Corp spend a significant amount of their time conducting field work with partner programs, directly impacting state and local races by working to increase urban youth voter registration as well as participating and organizing bus trips to swing districts to canvass for progressive candidates.

### **Pure Non-Partisan Youth Groups**

While this chapter focuses primarily on partisan or ideological attempts to engage young people, it would be a mistake not to mention that there are also a number of organizations who simply have one mission: to get more young people engaged in politics, regardless of political affiliation or ideology. These groups play an important role by providing colleges and universities as well as numerous businesses and organizations the opportunity to participate in improving civic participation without alienating certain segments of the population due to partisanship. These groups include: Rock the Vote, the Youth Vote Coalition, and World Wrestling Entertainment's (WWE) Smackdown Your Vote! just to name a few. While a whole chapter could be written on these groups alone, many use the same techniques mentioned above to engage young people.

It is clear, that a great amount of time, money, and man hours are placed into trying to engage young people in the political process. As discussed in previous chapters, work is important now more than ever to capture the hearts and minds of young voters.

Research has shown that once a person votes three times consecutively for the same political party, they are 70-80 percent like to continue to vote for that party for life.<sup>169</sup> Millennials are presently tending to vote for more progressive candidates. However, there is still time to affect the youth vote as many Millennials have not yet reached voting age and most have not voted in three elections. Therefore, to engage this generation, the work must continue. The next chapter will explore the best practices for engaging youth. Does one focus solely on new technology such as YouTube and text messaging, or do simple tried and true on-the-ground techniques also play a role?

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<sup>169</sup> The Bus Project, "Why Young People?"; available from <http://busproject.org/programs/building-votes/why-young-people/>; Internet; accessed 23 September, 2008.

## CHAPTER FOUR: STRATEGIES AND THE IMPACT OF ENGAGING YOUNG VOTERS

According to data compiled by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement,<sup>170</sup> young voter turnout increased in 2004 more than in any election since 18 year olds won the right to vote in 1972. Turnout among the nation's youngest voters ages 18-24 increased 11 percentage points from 36 percent to 47 percent; turnout among 18-29 year olds increased 9 points from 40 percent to 49 percent. The trend continued in 2005 when student-dense precincts in Virginia saw a turnout increase of 15 percent. Leading campaign professionals, analysts, and academics agree that one of the key factors driving this recent increase in turnout is that there has been, for the first time in decades, a major investment in mobilizing these voters. According to Rock the Vote's research arm,<sup>171</sup> in 2004, non-partisan organizations that ran peer-to-peer field operations, media, and visibility campaigns spent an estimated \$40 million on registering and turning out young voters, while a presidential campaign made a media buy targeting young voters, and partisan organizations both inside and outside of the party structures mobilized supportive youth. These turnout efforts paid off on Election Day as more than 20 million 18-29 year old voters cast a ballot. The lesson learned is that today's young adults are an engaged generation that will vote in higher numbers if they are asked.

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<sup>170</sup> The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, "The Youth Vote 2004"; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS\\_Youth\\_Voting\\_72-04.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_Youth_Voting_72-04.pdf); Internet; accessed 2 October, 2008.

<sup>171</sup> Rock the Vote, "Young Voter Mobilization Tactics"; available from [http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv\\_young\\_voter\\_mobilization\\_tactics-2006.pdf](http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv_young_voter_mobilization_tactics-2006.pdf); Internet; accessed 1 October 2008.

Given their size, it is also a crucial demographic to engage. The question now becomes: What are the most cost-effective ways to get young people to vote?

This chapter will explore a number of randomized experiments done to answer this question. Several different types of strategies will be examined from low-tech techniques such as door-to-door activity and phone calling to high tech, new techniques such as email and text messaging. In the end, this research shows that comprehensively, these techniques can increase turnout by a significant margin, and, in many cases, can shift the outcome of races up and down the ballot.

### **Low-Tech Turnout Techniques**

It is important to first explore, what for many campaigns, is a tried and true technique to increase turnout among all voters: door-to-door canvassing. According the Rock the Vote,<sup>172</sup> canvassing has the greatest impact on turning out young people to vote of any technique. For a cost of between \$11 and \$14, a campaign can get to the polls one new voter that would not have otherwise cast a vote. Overall, the research found a 7 to 10 percentage point increase among young voters contacted through a door-to-door operation. This significant increase demonstrates that all campaigns should incorporate young voters on their canvassing lists (many currently purge them). Canvassing is especially beneficial in dense student neighborhoods and apartment buildings where volunteers and staff can reach more people in less time, cutting the costs even more.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

One of the best demonstrations of door-to-door canvassing was performed by Peter Nickerson, a political science professor at Notre Dame and reported in a 2007 issue of the *Journal of Political Marketing*.<sup>173</sup> In his paper, Nickerson provides pooled results of six voter mobilization field experiments in which he explores the feasibility of delivering mobilization messages to young voters via door-to-door canvassing and the extent to which they are responsive to “Get Out the Vote” messages as compared to older voters. These canvassing experiments were conducted in local elections including: a school board race in Bridgeport, CT; a mayoral race in Detroit; a large slate of city offices in Minneapolis; a Congressional election in New Haven; a city council and mayoral race in Raleigh, NC; and a mayoral election in St. Paul. Through the analysis of these experiments, he found that young voters are as responsive to mobilization messages as older voters and that while it can be more difficult to reach young people, they can impact the election.

In each case in Nickerson’s study,<sup>174</sup> one individual was randomly selected from each household in the treatment group to be listed on the sheet that canvassers used to record with whom they spoke. The pitches given on each doorstep varied slightly between sites, but all contacts were informal and brief. Canvassers were equally inexperienced and received roughly the same amount of training by campaign staff. After recording which subjects in the treatment group were contacted, the official voter

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<sup>173</sup> David Nickerson, "Hunting the Elusive Young Voter," *Journal of Political Marketing* 5, no. 3 (2006): 47-69.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-69.

history of each person in the treatment and control group was gathered from the county boards of elections. The contact rate for young voters, which is the rate at which canvassers actually spoke to an individual, ranged between 18.3% and 37.8% across the six cities.

According to Nickerson,<sup>175</sup> there is enough statistically significant evidence to demonstrate the efficacy of face-to-face contact upon the general population, but no single one of them contained sufficient numbers of young people to determine if they react differently to the treatment, therefore he pooled the results of each experiment as it pertained to youth. By pooling the results, the number of young people in the sample group increases enough to measure efficacy of youth. Nickerson used two techniques to measure the impact on turnout for youth. In the first model, he found that for every 1000 youth contacts made, an additional 109 voters can be drawn to the polls. His second model indicated that if the baseline rate for voting were 50%, contacting a young registered voter would increase the likelihood of voting to 64.8%, a 14.8 percentage point increase. Effects of this can especially be seen in very low turnout elections. For example, in the Bridgeport, CT study where turnout of young people was found to be 3% of young registrants, being contacted by a canvasser resulted in a 123% increase in voting to 6.7% of youth registrants. It is clear, based on this research that door-to-door canvassing could very easily change the outcome of a close election if the campaign

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 47-69.

works to contact youth. However, there are other methods that can increase turnout as well.

Phone calls are a good and relatively inexpensive way to turn out new young voters, if the calls are done right. According to Rock the Vote,<sup>176</sup> studies found that a personal phone bank calling college areas had much more success with a longer, conversational script. Specifically, volunteer phone banks or professional phone banks using a longer and chattier script consistently generate better voter turnout results, generating roughly one additional vote per 30 completed calls. The more conversational and interactive the phone call, the better. This can lead to a generated 2 to 5 percentage point increase in turnout. However, studies make clear that robo-calls are not effective.

One of the best examples of the effect of calling young voters to impact turnout was performed by the Youth Coordinated Campaign run by the Michigan Democratic Party and studied by Nickerson in addition to Ryan Fredericks and David King of Harvard. In their paper published in a 2006 issue of *Political Research Quarterly*,<sup>177</sup> they examined three techniques performed by the coordinated campaign: canvassing, phone calls, and door hangers with information. This experiment was conducted during the 2002 Michigan gubernatorial race. That year, the political landscape was charged with a closely contested race characterized by a lot of media attention and partisan and non-

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<sup>176</sup> Rock the Vote, "Young Voter Mobilization Tactics"; available from [http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv\\_young\\_voter\\_mobilization\\_tactics-2006.pdf](http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv_young_voter_mobilization_tactics-2006.pdf); Internet; accessed 1 October 2008.

<sup>177</sup> David Nickerson, Ryan F. Friedrichs, and David C. King, "Partisan Mobilization Experiments in the Field: Results from a Statewide turnout experiment in Michigan," *Political Research Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2006): 271-292.

partisan mobilization efforts. The race for governor was between Republican Lieutenant Governor Dick Posthumus and Democratic Attorney General Jennifer Granholm. In the end, Granholm won with 51% of the vote. Nearly 3.2 million voters cast ballots, which was a record for a non-presidential year. Areas targeted for the experiment included fourteen state house districts. Districts were selected according to three criteria: 1) size of the Democratic or independent 18-35 year-old voting population; 2) the number of contested races on the ballot; and 3) the capacity of local Democratic youth organizations. Subjects were drawn from a composite list of registered voters in Michigan. Registered voters at the same address and surname were grouped into households. The overall list contained 55,472 households and 70,591 voters.

For the phone call experiment, Nickerson and the rest of the research team<sup>178</sup> randomly assigned households to control and treatment groups. Treatment group phone numbers were then randomly ordered so households not contacted could be rolled into the control group. Phone numbers were available for about half the homes; 80 percent of these homes were assigned to receive a call. Members of the treatment group received a phone call prior to the election. Volunteer callers at the various sites followed strict protocol in placing calls. Subjects were counted if the volunteer spoke with the person or was able to leave a message. Contact rates ranged between 43.9 and 54.3 percent across experiments.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 271-292.

Nickerson and his research team<sup>179</sup> found that in over 80 percent of the total call experiments, voter turnout was higher than in the control groups. Controlling for demographic characteristics and past voter turnout, the authors estimate a 3.5 percentage point boost in turnout among the individuals who were actually contacted by phone calls. In the end, assuming labor costs of \$15 per hour, the authors estimate a cost of \$24 per vote. It is also interesting to note that in their research, the authors found that phone calls were the most cost effective of the three treatments they examined. While there is a statistically significant increase in turnout among youth when they are outreached via personal call, the same cannot be found for robo-calls, which are significantly cheaper to buy and easier to execute.

This was demonstrated in research performed by Ricardo Ramirez, a political science professor at University of Southern California. In his 2005 paper, "Giving Voice to Latino Voters: A Field Experiment on the Effectiveness of a National Nonpartisan Mobilization Effort"<sup>180</sup> published in *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, he found that robo-calls to voters had no statistical impact in turnout. His experiment was conducted examining the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO's) Voces del Pueblo voter mobilization effort in 2002. The 2002 Voces del Pueblo campaign sought to increase turnout among Latinos with a low propensity to vote. The voters targeted lived in precincts where Latinos made up at least

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 271-292.

<sup>180</sup> Ricardo Ramirez, "Giving Voice to Latino Voters: A Field Experiment on the Effectiveness of a National Nonpartisan Mobilization Effort," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 601 (2005): 66-84.

70 percent of the voting population and where turnout in previous presidential election was less than 50 percent. The registered voters targeted in this campaign had a voter turnout rate of 38 percent in 2000, which was approximately half the voter turnout rate among registered voters nationwide. The “Get Out the Vote” effort was conducted in six locations: Los Angeles County, Orange County (California), Harris County (Texas), Denver Metropolitan Area (Colorado), New York City, and the state of New Mexico.

According to Ramirez,<sup>181</sup> the initial database that was purchased from commercial vendors consisted of 465,134 registered Latino voters in low-propensity precincts. Of these, 405,058 individuals were randomly assigned to receive a voter mobilization through robo calls. The remaining 60,076 names were assigned to the control group. In the California, Houston, and New Mexico sites, voters received two calls of a script read by prominent Univision anchorwoman Maria Elena Salinas. In Colorado, NALEO used Denver council member Debbie Ortega, who read a similar script in English. The decision to use an English script reflected the low rates of bilingualism or Spanish use in Denver. Whether the calls were in Spanish or English, the possibility remained that some recipients were not fluent in the language in which the robo-calls were presented. Ramirez found that only one additional vote was gained for every 2800 people assigned to receive the robo-call, increasing turnout by a statistically insignificant .03 percent.

Finally, it is important to explore one final low tech method used to impact turnout: direct mail. This is the least effective method to impact turnout. In fact, no

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 66-84.

change was found as demonstrated in research commissioned in 2005 by Young Voter Strategies.<sup>182</sup> Now the research arm of Rock the Vote, they commissioned a study sending varying intensities of mail (two to four pieces) targeting voters 18 to 30 in Virginia during the 2005 elections. This experiment was also conducted using non-partisan messages from a youth organization as well as partisan messages from a Republican direct mail firm. Their findings discovered that at a cost of roughly \$0.45 per piece to make and send mail to 10,000 voters had no impact upon turnout in the Virginia elections.

### **New Technology**

While relatively low tech methods can be effective in increasing youth turnout, one would be remiss not to explore what has become the mainstay of the 2008 election season as it pertains to young voters, new technology and its potential to affect turnout. It is important to note here that many observers and experts do not believe there has been adequate research on these new techniques to fully determine their impact on turnout, however, early indications show some promise. This section will explore research on three areas of new technology and their impact on turnout: text message, email, and social networking sites.

The “oldest” of these new technologies is email. Early research on the use of email found no significant impact on turnout when exploring turnout over all. In early

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<sup>182</sup> Rock the Vote, “Young Voter Mobilization Tactics”; available from [http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv\\_young\\_voter\\_mobilization\\_tactics-2006.pdf](http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv_young_voter_mobilization_tactics-2006.pdf); Internet; accessed 1 October 2008.

research by Nickerson and Alissa Stollwerk found no increase in turnout by using email to encourage people to vote, similar to other forms of non personal communication.<sup>183</sup>

However, in June 2008, Rock the Vote's (RTV) research arm (formally known as Young Voter Strategies) found that targeted and strategically timed email message to youth can have impact upon registration and turnout.

RTV's research<sup>184</sup> found that by simply using an organization personal or group email list and asking their members to register to vote can be a surprisingly effective and low-cost tactic. In terms of strategy, RTV suggests that groups determine the best time in an existing email outreach schedule to include registration blasts. For example, these can be repeated every 2-3 months without a drop in the "click-through rate." In terms of the content of the email blast, RTV found that it is important to keep the message simple and focused on registration so that recipients can quickly understand the email's purpose. Finally, they suggest that organizations embed a voter registration form in the destination page and include a unique source code for that email so that an organization can track the number of registration form downloads.

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<sup>183</sup> David Nickerson, "Does Email Boost Turnout?," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 2, no. 4 (2007): 369-379. and Alissa F. Stollwerk, "Does E-mail Affect Voter Turnout? An Experimental Study of the New York City 2005 Election"; Institution for Social and Policy Studies, Yale University; available from <http://research.yale.edu/GOTV/?q=taxonomy/term/8>; Internet; accessed 9 October, 2008.

<sup>184</sup> Rock the Vote, "Winning Young Voters: New Media Tactics"; available from [http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv\\_new\\_media\\_tactics-june-2008.pdf](http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv_new_media_tactics-june-2008.pdf); Internet; accessed 10 October, 2008.

RTV's findings<sup>185</sup> also show that emails near registration deadlines are effective, but it is important to provide at least 1 to 2 weeks leeway to account for a slow response in opening the email. They also encourage groups to perform trial runs by setting aside a portion of the email list (about 20%) as a test group and divide into a several groups. Then send each group a different subject line and see which has the best response rate. Then use that subject line to outreach to the remaining email addresses on the list. Finally, it is important to be consistent. The destination page should look similar to the email and be focused solely on the registration form. Finally, the organization should set up the page to open the registration form automatically.

RTV's testing<sup>186</sup> demonstrated an overall response rate of between 0.5% and 5%, depending on 1) email address quality, 2) the prominence of the call to register, and 3) the effectiveness of the email's subject line. For their organization, that corresponded to one registration form download for every 20 to 200 emails sent out. Therefore, at a 0.5% response rate, an organization with a million-person email list can generate about 5,000 voter registrations downloads by encouraging their members to register and at \$0.05 per email. That is a cost of \$10 per registration form download, which is comparable to the other forms of traditional registration techniques already discussed.

In their study,<sup>187</sup> RTV also found that there are some very unique email registration programs that worked best. One was specifically targeting young movers

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

using change of address data from the U.S. Post Office. That was proven to be a highly effective targeting technique, generating response rates between 1% and 7% which resulted in a cost per form download of \$2 to \$10. Secondly, they found that targeting unregistered youth using voter file data is more expensive, in part because it is a population less likely to register to vote. The cost for this test program was about \$25 per form download with a response rate of 1%. In the end, it is clear that more research is needed to assess the overall effectiveness of email to effect registration and turnout, but since it is cost effective, email should more than likely be used in the overall “Get Out the Vote” plan for youth.

Another new technique that is now being used by campaigns and organizations to reach youth is text messaging. Rock the Vote’s (RTV) February 2008 poll found that 85% of 18 to 29 year olds own a cell phone, compared to 75% who own a landline phone.<sup>188</sup> This is confirmed by research conducted by Allison Dale of the University of Michigan and Aaron Strauss of Princeton. In their paper, “Mobilizing the Mobiles: How Text Messaging Can Boost Youth Voter Turnout,”<sup>189</sup> they found that a growing number of Americans rely exclusively on mobile technology as their primary means of communication. Therefore, political campaigns and voter mobilization groups must

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<sup>188</sup> Rock the Vote, “Rock the Vote Young Voter Poll 25 Feb 2008”; available from [http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv\\_poll\\_bannerbook-feb-2008.pdf](http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv_poll_bannerbook-feb-2008.pdf); Internet; accessed 10 October, 2008.

<sup>189</sup> Allison Dale and Aaron Strauss, “Mobilizing the Mobiles: How Text Messaging Can Boost Youth Voter Turnout,” The New Voters Project; available from <http://dev.newvotersproject.org/uploads/vR/2v/vR2vTV3whpklL5XVBlkBrQ/Youth-Vote-and-Text-Messaging.pdf>; Internet; accessed 10 October 2008.

reevaluate how they connect with this segment of voters who aren't reachable through conventional landline and U.S. mail outreach.

The Dale and Strauss study<sup>190</sup> demonstrated that text messaging is a powerful tool that can be used to harness and engage the voting power of young people. In their study, the authors worked with several independent, non-partisan youth outreach organizations such as Working Assets, the Student PIRGs, and Mobile Voter. These groups registered nearly 150,000 new voters leading up to the 2006 elections. Of these registrants, over 12,000 provided cell phone numbers that were selected for the experiment to test the effectiveness of text messaging. Half of the participants received a text message reminder to vote on the Monday before Election Day; half did not. Members of the treatment group, who received the reminder, voted at a rate of 56.3, while members of the control group, who did not receive the reminder, voted at a rate of 53.2%, a difference of 3.1 percentage points. Statistically, there is over a 99% chance that the text messages had a net benefit on turnout. Additionally, a text message recipient was 4.2 percentage points more likely to vote than an individual who did not receive a text message. They found that generally, messages that were short and to the point were most effective. For their study, the cost per vote generated was \$1.56, which is far less than the cost of other techniques examined thus far.

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

A post-treatment survey of text recipients by Dale and Strauss<sup>191</sup> demonstrates that recipients found the text messages to be helpful. A plurality of respondents (43%) volunteered that they were pleased with the text message. When asked to describe their reaction as finding the text message “helpful” or being “bothered” by receiving the text, a majority (59%) reported that the reminder was helpful. Only 1% reported being less likely to vote as a result of receiving the text message. Respondents to the survey also indicated that text messaging and email are their preferred methods of receiving political communication (31% and 30% respectively). Anecdotally, it seems that many campaigns and organizations are taking this research to heart. Both presidential campaigns and major political parties during the 2008 campaign offered the opportunity for volunteers and supporters to receive text message updates.

Lastly, in the age of political campaigning 2.0, it would be incomplete not to mention the growth of social networking sites as a means of outreach. The most prominent of these sites for young Americans is Facebook. According to research by Rock the Vote (RTV),<sup>192</sup> nearly 21 million adult Americans have Facebook accounts to date, of which 18 million are ages 18 to 29. One-half of all Facebook users visit the site on a daily basis. They found that for organizations interested in registering and mobilizing young voters, four Facebook features stand out as the most useful: fan pages, events, groups, and advertising.

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Rock the Vote, “Winning Young Voters: New Media Tactics”; available from [http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv\\_new\\_media\\_tactics-june-2008.pdf](http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv_new_media_tactics-june-2008.pdf); Internet; accessed 10 October, 2008.

RTV first examined Facebook Fan Pages.<sup>193</sup> On the site, any organization, campaign, or politician can create a fan page, which acts as their central point of contact for the Facebook community. Supporters can then visit the fan page to get the latest content such as blog posts, photos, and videos from the campaign in a way that is fully integrated with Facebook interface. They can also receive message updates from the fan page, alerting them to action items, deadlines, or important events. Facebook users who subscribe to a fan page can then display a link to that organization or campaign on their own profile page. The profile link ultimately acts as a recruitment tool for their friends to join the fan page.

The second useful tool RTV examined was the Facebook events application.<sup>194</sup> Facebook events are a social RSVP system designed to encourage peer-to-peer interaction and invitations. Supporters can easily invite their friends to campaign events and expand exposure beyond the initial list of invitees. When one person responds to an event, all of their friends can see their response, which quickly spreads awareness of the event through a person's social network. RTV found that it is important to use Facebook events as an earned media and organizing tactic by creating events for campus appearances, registration deadlines, fundraisers, and on Election Day.

Thirdly, RTV found that Facebook groups are also a growing commodity on the social networking site.<sup>195</sup> Many of these groups are related to political issues, popular

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

local candidates, or upcoming elections, and can grow at astonishing speeds due to the viral nature of online social networks. When groups are related to political engagement they provide a unique and powerful opportunity to harness new members to online voter registration, and at no cost. RTV recommends that political organizations and campaigns in particular should create Facebook groups for their key programs and issues as a way to build awareness among young voters. However, it is important to stress that groups are more limited than fan pages in that they cannot import content from outside sources. They also do not support the event system's RSVP functions.

Finally, in addition to the numerous free avenues to engage youth via Facebook, RTV found that the site also provides space for relatively low-cost advertising.<sup>196</sup> Political campaigns and organizations can purchase "Social Ads" on Facebook, which are small advertisements similar to ads found on search engines such as Google. They can be specifically targeted to touch demographics (such as age, gender, education status, and relationship status), geography (country, state, and city), and place of employment, school, and profile keywords. These targeting options make Facebook ads a very inexpensive tactic for voter registration and messaging on a candidate or salient issue.

RTV found that the most effective ads had several important and useful characteristics.<sup>197</sup> First, a title with a clear "call to action," such as "Register to Vote" or "Vote on Tuesday" worked the best. Groups should also include the target geography in

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

the text, for example, “Pennsylvania votes on April 22nd.” They also found that timing the ads to run near a registration deadline or close to Election Day can more than double the click-through rate, leading to a lower the cost of the ads. Since ads are so inexpensive, RTV found that organization should test multiple advertising designs at the same time and eliminate poor performing designs. RTV also suggested that it is wise for organizations to track link based performance of Facebook ads. If an ad links to the organization’s website, RTV suggests including a tracking code in the URL to log the number hits sent by the ad. Finally, in order to save money, RTV also suggests organizations and campaigns buy ads on a pay-per-click basis rather than pay-per-impression.

In terms of the overall cost for Facebook outreach, RTV<sup>198</sup> found that a clear, simple registration advertisement on the site can generate a registration form download for \$5 - \$10 and can be highly targeted. However, targeting generally increases the cost per registration and reduces the total number of registrations that will be generated over a given time period. Other methods of online organizing, such as events, groups or fan pages, generate registrations at no cost other than staff and volunteer time.

Finally in their study, RTV provided a number of success stories using Facebook.<sup>199</sup> For example, a student created a Facebook group entitled “1,000,000 Strong for Stephen T. Colbert,” which reached its membership goal in less than two

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

weeks. The student added an online voter registration link and generated about 4,000 registration form downloads within a week. In the end, the group has been responsible for over 11,000 registration form downloads, or one download for every 76 group members. Additionally, one successful Facebook event, “Presidential Election 2008,” has generated 5,300 registration downloads. With 600,000 RSVPs, that corresponds to about one download per 112 RSVPs. A smaller event for the Texas primaries generated 500 downloads in January 2008, at rate of one download per 11 RSVPs.

### **So What Does all This Mean?**

So what themes and points can we take away from the Get out the Youth Vote techniques? Rock the Vote’s research arm (formally Young Voter Strategies) found several key themes in assessing the success of youth engagement strategies.<sup>200</sup> First and foremost, quality counts. Actual votes per contact will be higher when the contact is more personalized and interactive. The research explored here shows that the most effective method of generating a new voter is an in-person door knock by a peer. The next greatest impact was seen by phone banks and text messages. Calls are more successful with longer, chattier phone scripts and with volunteers making the calls, while short text messages are best. In addition, the research also shows that the online tools that are most effective are ones where the young voter either opts-in to the conversation

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<sup>200</sup> Rock the Vote, “Young Voter Mobilization Tactics”; available from [http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv\\_young\\_voter\\_mobilization\\_tactics-2006.pdf](http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv_young_voter_mobilization_tactics-2006.pdf); Internet; accessed 1 October 2008.

or gets to interact in some way. Finally, it is clear that less personal and interactive outreach tactics are less effective at turning out voters.

Another key point RTV found is to “begin with the basics.”<sup>201</sup> Young people need basic and practical information about how to register and vote. Efforts that make those activities more convenient are quite effective. Also, the research findings illustrate that efforts to make the voting process easier increase turnout in the most cost-effective ways. Finally, research has not found that partisan verses non-partisan of messaging works better than another. It is more about making a quality contact.

Thirdly, young people are easy to incorporate into an organization and campaign’s turnout programs and that excluding young voters from turnout efforts is a mistake.<sup>202</sup> The research findings all demonstrate that young people are just as responsive to voter contact as older voters. While voters under 30 respond to turnout tactics at the same rates as older voters, in some communities they are more difficult to reach, so targeting must take this into consideration. Additionally, efforts in ethnic communities found young people as easy to reach as older voters, and student areas and apartment building have dense residences that lead to very high contact rates.

Finally, RTV found that “initial mobilization makes for repeat voters.”<sup>203</sup> Successful mobilization in one election raises people's propensity to vote in subsequent elections. Parties, candidates and interest groups should expect long-term benefits from

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

mobilizing youth today. As demonstrated in the Nickerson study, the authors found that 50 percent of the effect of canvassing during the 1998 New Haven election persisted in 1999, even though there were no additional efforts to get out the vote. This corresponds to other research that found that once people begin to vote, their propensity to participate in future elections rises. The study found that if you get a person to vote in one election, they will be 29 percentage points more likely to vote in the next election. Additional studies conducted in previous decades also found that adults' party identification were remarkably stable over the course of their lives. If these patterns persist, then the odds are high that someone who is mobilized to vote for a particular party will continue to vote for that party for decades to come.

### **Conclusion**

In the end, it is clear that these techniques can have a huge consequence on the outcome of elections, as demonstrated by Rock the Vote.<sup>204</sup> In their study of the 2006 elections, turnout among 18-29 year olds increased by approximately two million over 2002 levels, making it the second election in a row with a significant jump in young voter turnout. Young voters also increased their share of the electorate as well, growing from 10% in 2002 to 12% in 2006. The margin of victory in several U.S. Senate races was less than young voters' turnout increase from 2002 to 2006. In Montana, Jon Tester defeated Conrad Burns by 3,562 votes while youth turnout increased by 39,106. In Virginia, Jim

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<sup>204</sup> Rock the Vote. "Young Voter Mobilization Tactics: Volume II" Available from [http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv\\_young\\_voter\\_mobilization\\_tactics\\_ii-2007.pdf](http://www.rockthevote.com/assets/publications/research/rtv_young_voter_mobilization_tactics_ii-2007.pdf). Internet accessed 1 October 2008.

Webb defeated George Allen by 9,329 votes while youth turnout went up by 110,453. Finally, in Missouri Claire McCaskill defeated Jim Talent by 48,314 votes while youth turnout went up by 108,269. What do these campaigns have in common other than shifting the balance of power in the Senate to the Democrats? Young voters turned out in large numbers in these races because in each state there were youth-targeted nonpartisan registration and mobilization efforts, in addition to the campaigns themselves targeting youth with door knocking, phone calls, candidate events, Internet outreach, and other tactics.

Looking to the 2008 election season, one can already see the considerable increases in youth engagement in the primaries and general election, most notably on the Democratic side. Senator (now President-elect) Barack Obama was the beneficiary of that engagement. He engaged young people in a way no one had ever seen before using new technology coupled traditional field tactics to bring more young people to the polls than in any primary or general election since 18 year olds won the right to vote. Many states saw double or even triple the number of young people voting, mainly voting for Barack Obama by a margin over 30 points. According to estimates provided by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement<sup>205</sup>, in the Iowa, Missouri, and Mississippi primaries (states won by Obama), the number of young people at the polls tripled as compared to 2004. In addition, millions of new voter registrations

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<sup>205</sup> The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, "The Youth Vote in the 2008 Primaries and Caucuses"; available from [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS\\_08\\_primary\\_summary.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_08_primary_summary.pdf); Internet; accessed 10 October 2008.

came from young people during the election. All of this leads to the question: could 2008, with the help of millennial voters, be a realignment election? The final chapter of this thesis will explore this phenomenon and show how, with young voters increasing their power, the country maybe on the verge of a seismic shift in American politics.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: THE ELECTION OF 2008: A POLITICAL REALIGNMENT?**

This thesis has tried to fully examine the birth of a new generation of political actors, the Millennials. It has also tried to dispel the incorrect assertions that young voters do not care about their communities and will not be engaged in political discourse. This thesis has also shown that the Millennial generation is progressive, forward thinking, incredibly diverse, and large in size. It has also examined the best ways to continue to increase Millennial participation as time goes on. Based on their performance in the 2008 elections, this generation has begun to make their political mark in a big way and from the looks of it, will continue for the next 40 years. In the end, the question of young voters should not be “Will young people vote?” but “Will this generation of young people vote?” The answer: unequivocally, “yes.”

So, what happened on election night 2008? When Barack Obama was elected president, this nation, in many ways, signaled a change with its past beyond merely smashing the racial barrier. The election marked the end of the baby boomer presidency and emergence of a new, 21st-century American electorate the likes of which has never been seen before. It's young, increasingly nonwhite, and embraces a different kind of politics. This thesis discusses the arrival of one element of this coalition of voters who value action over partisanship, favor consensus over ideology, and believe government can be an ally, not the enemy. That group is young voters. This chapter will conclude with an exploration of youth participation and engagement in the 2008 election as well as

a beginning discussion of whether or not this election signals the end of one era and beginning of a new one.

### **Young Voters in 2008**

According to recent reports and tabulations calculated by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE),<sup>206</sup> an estimated 23 million young Americans under the age of 30 voted in the 2008 presidential election. This signifies an increase of 3.4 million compared with 2004, using overall vote count projections by Dr. Curtis Gans, director of American University's Center for the Study of the American Electorate, latest exit polls, and Census Current Population Survey. In terms of overall turnout, CIRCLE estimates that youth voter turnout rose to between 52 percent and 53 percent, which is an increase of 4 to 5 percentage points over CIRCLE's estimate based on the 2004 exit polls. The 2004 election was a strong one for youth turnout, reversing a long history of decline. If one compares 2008 with 2000, the increase in youth turnout stands at least 11 percentage points. In the end, 2008's youth turnout rivals or exceeds the youth turnout rate of 52% in 1992, which is the highest turnout rate since 1972 (55.4%).

Peter Levine, director of CIRCLE stated that:

“Young Americans went to the polls in record numbers, showing they are an influential voting bloc in American politics. This reflects [young people's] deep concern about the critical issues at stake and the impact of this election on [the] country's future. [Young people] must build on the momentum from this

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<sup>206</sup> The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “Youth Turnout Rate Rises to at Least 52% with 23 Million Voters Under 30”; available from <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=323>; Internet; accessed 7 November, 2008.

election to motivate all young people to get involved in politics, government and their community. It is also critical that communities, government and institutions capitalize on this opportunity to engage young people by expanding civic opportunities for young Americans.”<sup>207</sup>

In terms of candidate support, according to CIRCLE,<sup>208</sup> young voters favored the winner of the 2008 election by more than 2-1, forming a major part of the Senator Obama’s winning coalition. Overall, voters chose him over Senator John McCain by a much narrower margin of about 53% to 46%. This gap in presidential choice by age is unprecedented. The average age-gap in support for the Democratic candidate from 1976 through 2004 was only 1.8 percentage points, as young voters generally supported the same candidate as older voters in most elections. Youth also were an increasing portion of the overall electorate. Young people (ages 18-29) represented 18 percent of the voters in 2008. That is one point higher than in 1996, 2000 and 2004, when young voters represented 17 percent of voters in each presidential election.

The increase in youth share and turnout are substantial, especially in contrast to the projection that overall voter turnout will either stay the same or increase by one percentage point. According to CIRCLE’s calculation,<sup>209</sup> the increase in youth votes accounts for at least 60% of the overall increase in the number of votes, suggesting that the 2008 election mobilized young people more than any other age group. One item to

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

note, however, is that these numbers may in fact be revised upward as new data will come in via the census and other organizations in the beginning of 2009.

### **A Realignment?**

According to a recent article in the *San Jose Mercury News*, this election signaled a “goodbye to '60s-style politics that shaped the baby boomers, punctuated by idealism and polarization, and the anti-government conservatism of the 1980s Reagan era.”<sup>210</sup>

Morris Fiorina, a Stanford University professor of history and Hoover Institution fellow who studies changing voter habits stated that “[This country is] at one of those turning points encounter[ed] periodically in history where people have lost faith in the old order and are looking for something new and it's often a generational change that leads to it.”<sup>211</sup>

But has the United States truly experienced a realignment to the left?

While a new thesis would be required to accurately answer this question, there are a few clues which lead this author to speculate in the direction of a political realignment.

In their book, *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube and the Future of American Politics*,<sup>212</sup> Morley Winograd and Michael Hais predicted that 2008 would be a realigning election. They coupled the beliefs, attitudes, and size of the Millennial generation with their use of a new medium of technology, the internet, to vastly change the landscape of

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<sup>210</sup> Mary Anne Ostrom, “Political Shift: Diverse Voting Coalition Favors Consensus, Government Action,” *The San Jose Mercury News*, 8 November 2008; available from [www.mercurynews.com/elections/ci\\_10935648](http://www.mercurynews.com/elections/ci_10935648); Internet; accessed 12 November, 2008.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais, *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 17-24.

American politics. “Change,” a word used by Democrats and many Republicans during this campaign, was not just an Obama phenomenon. It's also not just young voters. Blacks and Latinos, who turned out in record numbers in this election, are long believers in activist government. In addition, the nation's immigrant communities desired a break from policies that penalize instead of welcome newcomers. This coalition of voters coming together to change the political landscape can be seen as one facet to the beginnings of a political realignment to a more progressive nation.

Another characteristic of a realignment election is that some form of “tipping event” occurs. Many are beginning to attribute the economic meltdown that began in September 2008 as well as recent blunders concerning the government’s response to the war in Iraq and Hurricane Katrina as a one form of “tipping point,” described by Winograd and Hais,<sup>213</sup> which has hastened a shift from the laissez-faire attitude in government. After a tipping event occurs, broad swaths of voters begin to shift support from one political direction to another. In the case of 2008, it was in the direction of new regulations in the wake of the near-collapse of the nation's financial industry. In the past, it was the stock market crash of 1929 which led to the realignment election of 1932. In the 1960’s, the tipping events of the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King along with the impending civil rights struggle led to the dealignment election of 1968.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 17-24.

The final element to realignment, described by Winograd and Hais,<sup>214</sup> is the use of new technology available to the masses to influence and push Americans to the polls. In this recent election, the Millennial emerging generation sprung into action, as technology and politics melded to form a powerful virtual megaphone, allowing young people to bypass mainstream media and build online communities to push their own agendas. The consensus style comes from a desire to get things done, instead of getting bogged down in partisan politics. In the end, with the use of technology, the 2008 election results indicate that the “Me Generation” is ceding to the “We Generation.” This is similar to the realignment election of 1932 when the radio was a permanent fixture in American homes and the television in 1968.

If this was truly a realignment election, how did young people respond? In the same *San Jose Mercury News* article, Fiorina also stated that “young people led the movement into the Reagan coalition of the 1980s. And now with two-thirds under 30 voting for Obama, [one can] see them leading the movement the other way. [Such sweeping demographic changes] are not good for the Republicans.”<sup>215</sup> In fact, many Republicans agree they must rebrand the party to meet the coming tidal wave, find younger candidates, shed their “government is bad mantra,” and embrace the digital age head on. Bill Whalen, a Hoover Institution fellow and Republican analyst said that some parts of the Ronald Reagan campaign plan can be salvaged, but “it has to be adapted for

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 17-24.

<sup>215</sup> Mary Anne Ostrom, “Political Shift: Diverse Voting Coalition Favors Consensus, Government Action,” *The San Jose Mercury News*, 8 November 2008; available from [www.mercurynews.com/elections/ci\\_10935648](http://www.mercurynews.com/elections/ci_10935648); Internet; accessed 12 November, 2008.

the 21st century. [One] can still stick with lower taxes and anti-communism becomes anti-terrorism, but the third rubric has to change, Reagan's suspicion of government."<sup>216</sup> So did the country shift in a more progressive direction? This thesis cannot fully answer that question; it will be up to future researchers to fully examine the 2008 election to see if the country is truly entering a new era in American politics.

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

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